



## **When gender equality and Earth care meet: Ecological masculinities in practice**

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# 12 When gender equality and Earth care meet

## Ecological masculinities in practice

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### Introduction

The global social and environmental problems of today are gendered. They are products of the complex multiple and slow violences of masculinist social injustices and environmental degradation. Accordingly, this chapter considers the flawed aspects of mainstream masculinities and research on ecological masculinities, seeking an alternative path forward to a vibrant, living planet that celebrates the intrinsic value of all life. The first part of this chapter provides a conceptual overview of ecological masculinities, which advocates for a transformation from masculine hegemonisation<sup>1</sup> to ecologisation.<sup>2</sup> In their monograph, *Ecological Masculinities: Theoretical Foundations and Practical Guidance*, Hultman and Pulé (2018, pp. 53–54) positioned ecological masculinities as a conceptual shelter for conversations about men, masculinities and the Earth.<sup>3</sup> The arguments presented here are based on the premises conveyed in that text.

As a growing field of study with accompanying pluralised praxes, ecological masculinities prioritise concurrent systemic and personal transformations. Hultman and Pulé (2018, Chapter 8) recognised that further field research testing the practical manifestations of ecological masculinities were needed. This led to the development of an education material<sup>4</sup> and workshop series designed to help accelerate the ecologisation of masculinities throughout civil society, to promote shoulder-to-shoulder work with women and non-binary individuals, and organisations in support of gender equality and ending men's violence against those humans and other-than-humans who are traditionally marginalised. Notably in support of environmental justice, girls and women have been the principle international leaders of grassroots movements. The clear lack of male engagement is problematic since men, being the main perpetrators of violence against the planet and people, carry the lion's share of responsibility to change these fatal and unjust social and ecological realities. With this in mind, the second part of the chapter discusses research and analyses of the education in question piloted at a community garden space in Järna, Sweden, called 'Under Tallarna' (or 'Under the Pine Trees'). An assessment of participant experiences of the education revealed ideological and behavioural changes, indicating possible positive paths forward for men and the mosaic of

masculinities that they harbour. Interviews were conducted with the all-male participants at the end of the workshop series. All interviewees participated voluntarily and were supportive of gender justice and environmental care to varying degrees from the outset of the workshop series. The following personal themes emerged from the interviews as increased outcomes of the education: interconnectivity, accountability, emotional literacy and embodied knowledge. On a systemic level, the efficacy of this education was considered for its capacity to help male participants integrate the realities of our social and ecological crises, and become proactive contributors to creating a gender-equal and ecologically sustainable world for all.

### **Politics in the (m)Anthropocene**

This is a critical moment; a time where the destructive forces of human societies on the Earth's living systems are irrefutable. Anthropogenic global heating has become a disastrous consequence of human industrial activities. What was for decades an intellectual exercise, a concern, a fear, a prediction, an ominous warning, a cautionary tale, is now our cumulative global reality (Lindvall et al., 2020). During the modern industrial era, transnational institutions have categorically avoided moving the planet closer to the necessary solutions (Allen et al., 2018). In fact, awareness and mitigation of these challenges have been met with unapologetic inaction and denial, which accompanies what Hultman and Pulé (2018) referred to as industrial/breadwinner masculinities.<sup>5</sup> Industrial/breadwinner masculinities are defined as 'malestream patriarchal, hegemonic and normative masculinities (which we apply primarily to men, but also to the masculinities adopted by some women and non-binary/genderqueer people as well)' who background the social and environmental implications of industrialisation for the sake of capital growth and its associated accesses to power and privileges (Hultman and Pulé, 2018, pp. 40–41). This definition stands with the tepid actions that attempt to regulate our problems away, which Hultman and Pulé (2018) referred to as ecomodern masculinities. Ecomodern masculinities have their origins in initiatives such as the Brundtland Report (1987; Hultman, 2013). This categorisation is aligned with calls for long-term sustainable development policies and practices that, when combined with measured responses to global emissions<sup>6</sup>, have resulted in reforms that pay lip service to the costs of industrialisation on human societies and the ecological integrity of the Earth. Ecomodern masculinities are the gendered identities that dominate systemic pathways that aim to protect and preserve economic growth while also offering nominal care for society and environment (Hultman and Pulé, 2018, pp. 45–46), which, for example, align with the ecological modernisation model for global climate governance. For many individuals (of all gender identities) who benefit from hegemonies that flourish through industrial/breadwinner and ecomodern masculinities, ecologisation can ignite an existential crisis that generates resistance in, at times, extreme forms – for example, the misogyny (and other forms of marginalisation, such as transphobia), pseudo-science and conspiratorial vitriol that commonly accompanies climate denial.

Both aforementioned masculinities categorisations rely heavily on hegemonic masculinist global economics.<sup>7</sup> They also give us insight into the comprehensive barriers that prevent transformational change towards greater care for the planet and people. Hultman and Pulé (2018) noted that the path dependencies that convey power and privileges to industrial/breadwinner are enmeshed with the fossil-fuelled economy (also see Daggett, 2018). They noted the similar inefficacy of ecomodern masculinities, replete with its reformist responses to climate change action through ecological modernisation that pervades global governance, at least in parts of Europe (Chapters 1 and 10, this volume). In combination, both masculinities illuminate the ways that humanity struggles to break free from the gravitational pull that shapes pursuits of consumer-driven self-gratification and, in doing so, places select groups of an advantaged few (particularly Global Northern, straight, white, middle- and older-aged men) ahead of the 'glocal' (global through to local) commons. Seeking solutions beyond these destructive socialisations, Hultman and Pulé (2018) posited a third categorisation called ecological masculinities, which looks beyond the enmeshment between masculinities and the global economic, political and social dependency on industrialised extractivism. They defined this relational categorisation as a material feminist and semiotic 'gathering point for previous conversations on men, masculinities and Earth' which prioritises and dramatises the transformation of masculinities from hegemonisation to ecologisation on political and personal scales (Hultman and Pulé, 2018, p. 53). Ecological masculinities – as conceptualised here and elsewhere (Hultman and Pulé, 2018, 2019; Pulé and Hultman, in press) – seek philosophical alignments with the hard-fought victories of feminists and ecological feminists in controverting men's habitual domination of marginalised groups and individuals along with other-than-human nature.

The view that the world is here for humans, and for a privileged few in particular, to benefit from is an obscene consequence of masculinist hegemonisation (Hultman and Pulé, 2018). Di Chiro (2017) has similarly considered that the (m)Anthropocene with its domination of 'white northern male voices' has created and driven the planet into an epoch of human-induced (male-dominated) global heating along with geological and ecological perturbations, as a nuanced interpretation of what is now broadly referred to as the Anthropocene (also see Raworth, 2014). Ironically, those who stand to lose the most from the knock-on effects of global heating have rushed to pump and mine oil, gas and coal, as if to suck as much wealth from the Earth as quickly as possible (perhaps an indication of their surreptitious acknowledgement of the climate science). In doing so, they have accelerated the severity of the social and ecological consequences needing to be urgently addressed (Anshelm and Hultman, 2014; Dunlap et al., 2016; Pulé and Hultman, in press). Those individuals of the aforementioned, largely Global Northern, straight, white, middle- and older-aged men, are deeply embedded within global industrial and economic systems (Demelle, 2019) and, thereby, are the common embodiments of industrial/breadwinner masculinities and the group most responsible for causing global and intergenerational destructiveness. Notably, some of these individuals have successfully fused ideological

climate change denial with right-wing nationalist political agendas around the globe (Anshelm and Hultman, 2014).<sup>8</sup>

The actions of these individuals and the groups they represent, are being contested with increasing levels of fierce grace. Consider Sweden's Greta Thunberg who, since 2018, has gained considerable prominence in the global youth-led climate justice movement. That movement has acutely challenged sceptics and deniers, even employing legal means in some instances (Arnoldy, 2019), making bold demands of international leaders to reverse the social and ecological trends of anthropocentrism (McCall, 2019). Thunberg has applied persistent pressure on international leaders to step up, and in doing so she and her colleagues have brought concerns about the growing climate emergency to the hearts and minds of a broader audience of global citizens – effectively mainstreaming the conversation and inspiring many to action. Youth-generated protests (e.g. Friday's for Future; Extinction Rebellion) have been met by climate change deniers, whose abundance of funds and lobbying efficacy, has flipped into high gear (Crowe, 2019). Commonly associated with right-wing nationalist political agendas and buoyed by denialist pseudo-sciences (Holland, 2014), the climate change denial machine has achieved wide-reaching influence over public debate (Hultman et al., 2019; The Climate Reality Project, 2019). The successes of these vocal minority views are highly funded and organised. They call attention to the need for proactive responses to the growing climate emergency. As an example, consider the increased scholarly attention that exposes these resistances towards effective mitigation politics, such as citizen's democracy, human rights, and the celebration of intra- and trans-species diversity as deeply masculinist (Kaiser and Puschmann, 2017; Forchtner et al., 2018). Some two years into regular youth-led climate strikes around the world, global governments are still in a state of dithering as a result of the bulwark created by these increasingly organised deniers (Thunberg et al., 2020).

Here, consider the global social and environmental terrains to be profoundly gendered precisely because they are steeped in economic inequalities that are correlated with race, class, geopolitics and age. The planet's most privileged groups and individuals are being challenged by the straightforwardness of young people in the climate justice movement who are calling denialism and right-wing nationalist political agendas to account. Their actions have exposed the obfuscating of injustices that accompany industrial/breadwinner masculinities, which have been illuminated by feminist and ecofeminist scholarship and activism for some time (Ruether, 1975, p. 204; Hultman and Pulé, 2018). From these trends, we can conclude that the (m)Anthropocene has a long heritage of gendered Global Northern invention. Our species' energy addiction, which has been fed by fossil fuelled economies for little more than a century, is only one (although a severe) example of the masculinist hegemonies and their associated practices that have weaponised and industrialised masculinist primacy (Hultman and Pulé, 2018). This is not a new phenomenon; the origins of this trend can in fact be traced back to the 17th century as our species transitioned towards the Industrial Revolution (Merchant, 1980). With a seemingly limitless bounty of the earth's resources,

boundless Indigenous lands to conquer and machinery to replace human labour, Global Northern imperialists have enacted settler colonial strategies to stretch the reach of their nations, ensuring a one-way flow of wealth from the Earth in its then farthest reaches, through the extracted, colonised, enslaved and dominated, back to Western Europe.

Ecofeminist scholars such as Susan Buckingham (2017), Greta Gaard (2014), Sherilyn MacGregor (2009) and Carolyn Merchant (1980) have illuminated this confluence of gendered characteristics and the dire social and ecological consequences of Western industrialisation over time. Such are the protracted failures of Western modernity. But these failings cannot define our future as a planet or species. Rather than ignoring or freezing in overwhelm in the wake of the social and ecological impacts of the (m)Anthropocene, this chapter argues in favour of masculine ecologisation and considers how this process can be manifested practically. The following sections introduce the case study of select participants from the men's reflective groups that piloted the education material.

### **The organisation MÄN and its work with gender equality and the environment**

MÄN is a feminist non-profit organisation that was founded in Sweden in 1993 to engage men and boys with gender equality and action against men's violence against women. MÄN's vision is a gender-equal world without violence. An important part of its work for change is to challenge destructive masculinities norms as they impact men's and women's relational exchanges, provide a space for self-reflection and discussion, educate in favour of violence prevention methodologies and promote gender-equal parenthood. MÄN is both a national federation with about 1,800 members and 20 local groups and associations around Sweden and a professional organisation with approximately 30 staff members (MÄNa, n.d.). MÄN currently has projects in Sweden and Eastern Europe, and is part of the international network, MenEngage, which involves men and boys in this work globally (MÄNb, n.d.).

In 2014, MÄN began looking at the intersection between gender equality, masculinity and the environment. The organisation acknowledged that ecofeminism has long identified the intersections between patriarchal structures and destructive norms around masculinity, resulting in environmental degradation. This was prompted by the organisation's recognition that men as a group have the largest ecological impact – leading to worsened conditions for women and children in particular – while it is mainly women who are assuming the responsibility to challenge ecological degradation and its social implications. MÄN started to use this insight to bring about change in masculinities norms in pursuit of gender equality and pro-environmental behaviour, concurrently (MÄN, 2019). MÄN proceeded to host seminars on men, gender equality and the environment, joined the Swedish Climate Network, wrote a discussion paper titled *Men, Masculinities and Climate Change* (Kato-Wallace et al., 2015) together with several MenEngage partner organisations, and initiated the Gender and Environment Network for

Inspiration (GeMiNI) – which is a ‘meeting place to explore and learn about the interlinked issues of gender, environment, climate and the related theory and practice’ that aims to ‘contribute to the public debate through regular joint activities, by increasing the awareness about gender and environment as interlinked issues that need to be addressed together’ (GeMiNI, n.d.).

By the end of 2017, the #MeToo movement commenced in response to multiple sexual abuse accusations, most acutely (but not exclusively) brought into the light by the sexual violations of Harvey Weinstein. Under the hashtag #MeToo on social media, many women testified to men’s sexual harassment and, thus, clarified the magnitude and normalisation of the problem (Sayej, 2017; The Everyday Sexism Project, n.d.). With this, about 1,000 men in Sweden turned to MÄN with questions about what they could do to contribute to change. Therefore, MÄN brought forward the conversation guide *#AfterMeToo* for men’s groups, where men got to reflect on their roles in patriarchal structures and the violence towards their surroundings. During four sessions of two hours each, men were encouraged to break with the male culture of emotional restraint and invincibility and feel and reflect on topics of masculinities norms, relations, sex, pornography and objectification of women, with a norm-critical approach. A central element is the specific format that promotes active listening and a fair distribution of sharing/speaking time (MÄN, 2018).<sup>9</sup> The *#AfterMeToo* workshop guide has since been expanded to include an additional four sessions linking men’s violence against women and genderqueer people to the structural violence against other-than-human nature. This conversation guide, called *Men in the Climate Crisis*, was piloted at the permaculture garden ‘Under Tallarna’ (‘Under the Pine Trees’) in Järna, Sweden.

### The men in the climate crisis reflective groups

Data were collected to assess and analyse the effectiveness of the initiative MÄN Under Tallarna; a pro-feminist workshop that was designed and implemented with men at this permaculture venue. In these reflective groups, men were encouraged to embrace the severity of the ongoing global ecological crisis, express feelings about it, reflect on their role in ecological degradation and find diverse ways to contribute to change. The groups explored how to choose reciprocity and care in the making of an equal and sustainable world without violence (MÄN, 2020).<sup>10</sup> *Men in the Climate Crisis* focuses on how to feel strengthened and engaged, rather than afraid and passive, about the crises and challenges of our times (MÄN, 2020).<sup>11</sup>

Between 2018 and 2020, MÄN Under Tallarna has hosted seven reflective groups, leading them through the *Men in the Climate Crisis* workshop – with six to eight participants in each group, spread over eight sessions (one session a week) of two hours each. The participants had actively sought out these groups, which suggests that they were positively attuned to pro-feminist and pro-environmental messaging. Robin Hedenqvist (2020) reached out to all these men to conduct interviews about their experiences. Half of them wanted to participate and, by



the end, the research resulted in in-depth interviews with seven participants. Those findings, accounted for in the following section, are based on these interviews and were summarised in his master's thesis (Hedenqvist, 2020). The seven participants were chosen based on their willingness and availability to meet in person for the interviews. The fact that these men were self-selected (interviews were only conducted with participants who were intrigued by the general request) had an impact on the study. For example, it could be that these men were keen to participate in the study just because of their strong opinion about the reflective groups and/or simply because they perceived personal change. If so, there would be a bias against experiences that are less dedicated or transformative.

The men interviewed gave several reasons for participating in the reflective groups: being environmentally and socially concerned; wanting to contribute to gender equality and a healthy environment; being curious about the male role and masculine identity; wanting to associate with other men; to develop as a person; and getting recommended to join. They were quite diverse in terms of age (between 30 and 65) and profession (e.g. in healthcare, professional communication, construction and engineering). Most, however, could be described as Western, white, middle-class, middle-aged, cisgender men. This is a privileged group within prevailing power structures that tend to have a socialised prepossession (or internalised sense) of feeling superior and entitled. In general, this group benefits from the socio-cultural role of industrial/breadwinner masculinities, reinforces it, and has a large socio-ecological footprint (Hultman and Pulé, 2018). Therefore, it is particularly vital to promote personal and structural change amongst this group of men. To study their experiences in the reflective groups is a potential pathway towards ecologisation.

### **Perceptions of global social and ecological crises, and men's roles in them**

There was a view amongst several participants that patterns of personal and internalised superiorisation of male domination, and the patriarchal structures that manifest them, are responsible for the abusive culture of industrial/breadwinner masculinities; a culture replete with its justifications of violence against marginalised people (especially women and genderqueer people) and other-than-human nature. In this culture of abuse, other-than-human nature is rendered a mere resource, deprived of intrinsic value, and is accompanied by disproportionately large levels of travel, meat and energy consumption. Caring for the global commons tends to be associated with traditionally feminine and womanly traits, thus offering a legitimate critique of hegemonic masculinities and manhood.

The emotionally restricting norms of toughness and stoicism promoted by hegemonic masculinist socialisations shun vulnerability internally and externally through social constraints that condition boys to suppress feelings and lose touch with their inner emotional life, and other people, as they grow up (Hultman and Pulé, 2018). Upon reaching adulthood, this lack of emotional comfort and ability to be earnest is in many men's lives expressed through domination and control,



effectively oppressing their surrounding environments in a similar manner to the suppression of personal feelings. To adopt a bully mentality and be violent against oneself, other men in dominant groups, marginalised people, and other-than-human nature can become a strategy to compensate for such emotional and personal insecurity. The double-ended suppression noted here is indicative of the emotional emaciation that commonly accompanies masculinist socialisations which are, of course, most acutely internalised by cis-males but can pervade the lived experiences of women and genderqueer people as well. These masculinist norms restrain feelings and intuition by reifying logical problem-solving, trust in economic rationalism, seeking technological fixes to social and ecological problems, and amplifying competitive and individualistic approaches to life that infer a materialistic narcissism (Mellström, 1995). These values have been imperatives for the institutionalisation of industrial capitalism and its associated ecological destruction, in which people (their labour) and other-than-human nature are considered sole resources for profit maximisation (Merchant, 1980).

The patriarchal/capitalist principle of domination, combined with the masculinist norms championed by industrial/breadwinner masculinities, block many men's abilities to acknowledge and deal with the pain and suffering that comes from abusive behaviour, effectively obstructing personal and structural change. In order to counteract these patterns of command and control that aim to 'tame' and subordinate the surroundings in similar ways to those who are 'otherised', it is vital to focus on and reconcile the lack of emotional and relational proximity amongst men as an important starting point in the transition from hegemonisation to ecologisation (Hultman and Pulé, 2018). In other words, men must feel the despair and loss associated with our global social and ecological problems (Pease, 2019).

### **Vulnerability and emotional literacy**

Interestingly, the participants in the workshops viewed the ability to care for the Earth, others and ourselves as deeply linked to the ability to be emotional and feel empathy and connectivity with others. One participant noted that:

How we are taking care of our Earth is linked to how we are taking care of our inner emotional life and how we are taking care of our relationships. It has a very strong connection. (Interviewee 6, our translation).

(Hedenqvist, 2020, p. 35)

Through the workshop series at Under Tallarna, it became evident that a vital first step towards ecologisation is to expose the costs of social inequalities and ecological destruction on the men themselves and the relationships that they hold most dear. The case study demonstrated that, from this starting point, facilitating broader, deeper, and wider care was not only made possible but became a natural series of next steps to be taken as the participating men were able to touch their inner despair about the state of the world. This may, on some level, seem

like more of the same; of making it all about the individualised man *in situ* and attempting to redefine masculinities norms, which runs the risk of enabling the reinvention of masculinist hegemonies dressed up in new and more caring forms (Pease, 2019). However, our research demonstrated that to go too far, too fast by breaking with masculinity altogether runs a great risk of cauterising many men's curiosity and willingness to find ways to be integral to solving our conundrums, beyond being blamed for the planetary problems. The male reflective groups welcomed the creation of a safe space in order to let one's guard down and be vulnerable for a change. In effect, they created a forum for the kind of 'learn[ing] how to express their emotions and concerns about the looming ecological crisis facing the planet' that Pease (2019, p. 121) called for. The participants were asked to reflect on the sense of entitlement, encouraged by masculine socialisations, that stands at the core of men's violence (against the Earth, others and the self) and made explicit through MÄN's #AfterMeToo foundational training. This resulted in expressions of grief concerning social and ecological exploitation and a will to scrutinise personal behaviour more closely.

Because ... I think as a man ... and I myself have previously in my life ... have taken a lot of criticism like it is me who is wrong. I've done wrong, I am wrong. And when you end up in that place, there is no room for development. And for further ... to open up and dare to be vulnerable. (Interviewee 4, our translation)

(Hedenqvist, 2020, p. 40)

Some participants discussed the ways that, before participating in the reflective groups, in-grained defence mechanisms laid into their psyches from a young age prohibited attempts to be open-hearted and get truly close to another person. A similar defensiveness was felt whenever criticism of specific (and relatable) behaviours was raised – invoking emotionally charged responses such as guilt, shame and anger, which were commonly suppressed, but through the workshop were encouraged and brought forth. These expressions of autonomy and toughness, aligning with traditionally masculine characteristics ('manliness' being defined by being 'unwomanly' [*sic*]), make it difficult to acknowledge the personal impacts of one's choices and/or behaviours on others. The research demonstrated that, for some men, this was a key source of resistance to change. Criticism became a threat to self-identity control and accumulated power, prompting some to aggressively reject or resist the ecologisation process. Notably, violent and oppressive behaviour was exposed for the way some men can use these traits to conceal the negative feelings evoked by criticism and accountability to planetary problems. These gendered responses preserved the status quo and the patriarchal social order.

The workshop series helped to illuminate the banal normality of industrial/breadwinner masculinities as a globally dominant unmarked categorisation and the role of these socialisations in securing power and control through the institutionalisation of masculinist and industrialised capitalism (Anshelm and Hultman,

2014). These revelations helped participants register the degree to which climate change denial was directly correlated in destructive ecological, familial and personal actions that disregarded the levels of care needed in a truly sustainable world. In this sense, the participants struggled to defend identities that are deeply tied to the self-gratifying and presumed right to dominate.

### Relationality, care, and embodiment

Several participants adopted a wider relational point of view through the reflective groups. The practices of active listening, problematising norms of masculinity, discussing how they have affected oneself and others while embracing the facts and experiences of oppressed 'others', and sharing intimate stories and feelings on these topics seem to have contributed to a greater sense of interconnectivity (illuminating the ways that everyone/everything is connected and constitutive of nature) and emotional literacy. It was made evident to participants in the workshop series that those behaviours and actions that they considered normal and harmless, might be experienced entirely different by others. In other words, the adage that 'no man is an island' became increasingly self-evident. When they became aware of the structural problems and the limitations they imposed, their willingness to challenge prevailing power structures increased.

While the workshops had the effect of exposing blind spots associated with white male privilege, shifting attention away from blaming and shaming the men made it easier to move towards more attentive and ecologically attuned sentiments and actions. It facilitated an openness where criticism could be constructively considered, not as a threat, but as an opportunity for self-development towards better social and ecological impact individually and societally. This mental shift was transformational and a vital ingredient in fostering accountability for personal actions, awakening the courage to question those who sustain an abusive culture and minimising the risks of future harmful social and environmental actions.

But then it also helped me ... the first male reflective group I joined last fall. It helped me a lot ... the step from the relationship with people, with take-off points in #Metoo, to the relationship with nature. That it wasn't just intellectual, but rather ... I just felt that I wanted to act in other ways. I stopped flying because it felt right, more than it was an intellectual decision. ... It helps me a lot that it doesn't feel like a sacrifice not to fly or not to watch porn for example, but it just feels ... right. (Interviewee 1, our translation)

(Hedenqvist, 2020, p. 38)

Most of the participants interviewed perceived themselves as conscious about issues of gender and the environment. A common assertion after completing the workshop series suggested that accumulating more *factual* knowledge about the climate crisis was not a priority, but rather emphasises the importance of

developing emotional literacy and relational connectivity with the other participants. This increased the 'contact awareness' (as referred to by one interviewee) and enhanced participants' abilities to *practise* their knowledge in everyday life, particularly with their loved ones. This represented a starting point from which the participants could then develop deeper emotional bonds with the Earth, others and themselves, motivating the participants to move away from destructive practices as a virtuous act rather than as a sacrifice. For example, awareness about heavy pollution associated with flying has become wider knowledge, but it was not until this knowledge became grounded in emotional connections to the environment that the pledge to never fly again could be made by some of the men who participated. Similarly, awareness existed about the domestic and societal violence and abuse associated with pornography but consumption and support for that industry had become a habit for some and this only subsided once emotional connectivity was forged in the self and with the group. Thus, building proximity with others (rather than dwelling in isolation) made it easier to break with destructive, privileged patterns and truly act according to values considered soul-serving rather than soul-destroying. Hence, to go from an isolated and intellectualised approach to building mutual and emotional ties to the Earth, others and the self, accelerated the development of 'embodied knowledge' and from that the implementation of caring behaviours in everyday life. To feel relational (as opposed to autonomous) became synonymous with feeling included, connected and part of something bigger than the self, making it harder to 'otherise' and dominate and easier to care.

### **(Re)connecting with nature**

Seemingly having improved the relational and emotional comprehension of participants, the workshop series served as an effective counterpoint to the myopic care and masculinist sentiments of industrial/breadwinner masculinities. Most participants expressed increased enthusiasm and action towards (re)connections with human and other-than-human others. This included reduced support for the physical and emotional distancing and alienation promoted by globalised markets and global ways of being (e.g. worldwide commodity chains, globetrotting, etc.) accompanied by a reclaimed and localised sense of place. One participant described how he discovered this underlying urge to be in the forest – a missing piece from his childhood that he had lost contact with – which has inspired him to go into the woods as often as possible:

the sessions have probably made me realise just how much nature means to me ... I grew up in the woods basically. But I came to the insight that I live so far away nowadays. I live so far away from nature. I'm never in the forest anymore. And it became very powerful for me that I feel a longing for those parts. So it's had the effect that I now on a principally daily basis look for the opportunities to go outdoors. ... And that, in turn, brings about more ... that you might want to live even more consciously than I did maybe. Yeah.

You think twice. In the small things. I don't take the car short distances. I try to go by public transport. A little more in that direction. And then also like I began to do with gender equality, to raise the issue in my everyday life and question those in my near surroundings. (Interviewee 7, our translation)  
(Hedenqvist, 2020, p. 46)

Apart from bringing him more energy, he proclaimed that the strengthened physical relationship with the outdoors gave him an increased sense of engagement with pro-environmental behaviour; to adopt continuous personal and interpersonal engagements that reduced ecological footprints and influenced others to do the same. He also stated that he used to think all problems were other men's fault, which stopped him from seeing his role in patriarchal structures, awakening personal accountability and responsibility, which he had not experienced before. Realising that he, too, must actively work against these structures in order to change things – not just point at others – became a pivotal motivator to become part of a core team at his male-dominated workplace to promote gender equality.

Another participant asserted how he previously sought personal and professional affirmations by being conscious and enacting what he believed to be progressive masculine traits. Through participation in the workshop series, he noted that personal appearances were previously overriding his deeper understanding and support for feminist and environmental progress on the structural level. This kind of superficial activism was registered as similar to ecomodern business strategies where more resources are put on 'pink-' and 'green-washing' than on contributing to authentic structural change. Think, for example, of how international apparel companies brand their products as sustainable and pay feminist celebrities to promote them, while having women and girls in South East Asian sweatshops making them for low wages under dreadful conditions that also pollute the surrounding environment with chemical discharge (ITGLWF, 2011). He noted that being open, vulnerable and self-reflexive developed his awareness of the differences between shallow and deep activism, and with this insight, enabled him to focus on actual change – such as practising a gender-equal relationship and parenthood with his partner.

It has definitely been a start to ... a work, a process and maybe above all, a spiritual part of the environment. Like it also was a lot about ... like connecting, getting in touch, feeling a birch or something. Finding something ... that we also belong together in some way. More gratitude about everything I get ... that I eat less meat than I did before since it just feels right. But if I do, not always, but quite often, I can think that this has been a cow or a deer and send a small thought of thankfulness that I get to eat a little piece. (Interviewee 1, our translation)

(Hedenqvist, 2020, p. 45)

Other participants inferred an elevated concern for (other-than-human) animal welfare. This awareness brought with it a greater inclination to acknowledge and

bless the other-than-human animal on the plate, reducing meat and dairy consumption, as well as a desire to become self-sufficient where meat was still produced by developing skills in animal husbandry in order to raise the animals at home, under less cruel conditions than in industrial farming. These expressions indicate a further relational viewpoint where the connection to – and care for – other-than-human animals increased and represented a first step towards recognising their intrinsic value. However, a reticence towards veganism and plant-based diets was noted, suggesting that patterns of masculinist entitlement to the ‘otherised’ bodies of other-than-human animals persisted in this instance (cf. Aavik, *in press*). A less anthropocentric perspective was held by one participant who promoted the rights of other-than-human animals as well as plants, after having claimed that the lack of biodiversity visible in monocultures implicates a kind of suffering for them. The small-scale (g)local community was, nonetheless, viewed as a place to challenge alienation and social and ecological exploitation through elevated engagement in meaningful relations with the environment. The closer relationality and emotional bond to nature (animals included) were believed to facilitate caring behaviours as the impacts of one’s actions become increasingly visible and relatable. It was highlighted that such integrated (g)localised living would be simpler but also healthier and more fun than the idealised but de-animated (Global Northern) lifestyles and conditions that are revered today.

Ultimately, the way in which these men narrated their experiences at Under Tallarna, the global ecological crisis and their role in it, positions social and environmental justice as ideal. Their narratives indicate that pro-feminist and pro-environmental reflective groups can be used to strengthen the relational and emotional bonds to nature; bonds that facilitate a sense of accountability characterised by a heightened sensibility towards the surroundings that guides a better ecological and social impact. We conclude that the education considered here took participants some way to what Latour (2014) inferred is a purposeful life in the epoch of the (m)Anthropocene, where:

all agents share the same shape-changing destiny. A destiny that cannot be followed, documented, told, and represented by using any of the older traits associated with subjectivity or objectivity. Far from trying to ‘reconcile’ or ‘combine’ nature and society, the task, the crucial political task, is on the contrary to distribute agency as far and in as differentiated a way as possible.  
(Latour, 2014, p. 17)

At least until transformational experiences, such as these workshops, enable us to transcend the object/subject relationship. In this particular case study, the participants shared a desire to support the rise of such Earth-inclusive approaches to lives of action that help reconcile the root causes of social injustices and ecological degradation towards truly sustainable (ecologised) thinking. This goes beyond (ecomodern) end-of-pipe solutions that temporarily alleviate guilt through deflection and keep organised and structural change in the space of reform. Their (perceived) personal changes counteract the alienation from, and abuse of,

marginalised (eco)systems, groups and beings – that so commonly is encouraged by industrial/breadwinner masculinities – and enable the institutional transition towards norms and practices in favour of broader, deeper and wider care for our glocal commons.

## Conclusion

The devastating social and ecological crises of the (m)Anthropocene have exposed industrial/breadwinner masculinities as heavily influencing the perpetuation of a world order based on domination over our glocal commons. Western masculine socialisations are deeply tied to values and identities aligning with industrial modernisation and the extractivist global political economy. There is, thus, a vital and urgent need to reconsider the ways that men and masculinities are constructed away from the reification of hegemonic patriarchal domination towards broader, deeper and wider care. Building on ecofeminist insights, the conceptualisations of ecological masculinities have emerged as one way to facilitate such a transition. One of the pluralised ways in which this concept seeks practical change is through an educational material and workshop series for male reflective groups that has been piloted in Järna, Sweden, which we have considered in this chapter.

Interviews with participants revealed that they experienced personal changes towards more caring values and behaviours as a result of the workshop series. Some common themes crystallised as increased outcomes of the education: interconnectivity, accountability, emotional literacy and embodied knowledge. The interviewees asserted that they were conscious about issues of gender and environment even before joining the groups, and that it was one of the reasons for participating, but that it often felt difficult to act in line with their awareness. To access suppressed feelings about personal, familial, social and ecological crises and listen to other people's stories in a safe space seem to have had a positive effect on their emotional and relational capabilities. Several participants implied achieving a heightened sense of emotional literacy and interconnectivity (how everyone/everything is connected, and constitutive of, nature), which made it feel good and less of a sacrifice to engage in pro-feminist and pro-environmental behaviours and act according to their awareness. Hence, emotional and relational literacies were necessary additions to the knowledge/factual comprehension in promoting empowerment and personal change in the first instance and to, in turn, foster challenge to the deep structures of patriarchy, including a shift from entitlement to care and collective responsibility. To transcend the rationality of the mind and the emotionality of the body can be described as developing 'embodied knowledge' that facilitates accountable actions towards more caring ecological and social impacts. While the following outcomes are not assured, the participants did indicate these personal changes from the reflective group workshop series: increased engagements for gender equality at home and work; more attentiveness to the lives of human and other-than-human others; developed closer bonds with nature, both emotionally and



physically; made commitments to stop flying; reduced meat and dairy consumption; larger willingness to organise.

Through the reflective groups the process of masculine ecologisation, as constructed by these men, reinforced the personalised and structural transitions towards norms and practices aligning with social and environmental care. In this sense, what the participants shared in the interviews after they had been part of the reflective groups may offer a glimpse of hope that men's care can be extended to global environmental issues, they can change, and the gendered aspect of our social and ecological problems is transformable. The study did have notable limitations. Specifically, the education was tested with progressive men who, although clearly in need of overcoming passive awareness, were already receptive to visions of a gender-equal and environmentally caring world. In this sense, they represented a favourably biased test group. Consequently, future research could focus on how other, less progressive groups of men experience the *Men in the Climate Crisis* workshop series, along with mixed groups, women only and non-binary only groups as well. Developments in alignment with these recommendations are underway. Version two of the education material is currently in development. This development of the education material in the direction of broader gender inclusivity will provide fresh opportunities to study the ways that women, genderqueer people and mixed groups experience this education material and workshop series. This level of diversification offers rich ground for further theoretical and methodological testing of the education materials and its efficacy in awakening broader, deeper and wider care, not only in men, but throughout the masculinities that dwell in us all. In support of this development, future studies would benefit from pre- and post-participant interviews, in order to reach beyond the self-perceived changes of participants, to include codable metrics, and with those, quantitative analyses.

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## Notes

- 1 Masculine hegemonisation is used here to indicate the active process of reifying select masculinities norms, such as insertion into spaces, being competitive, righteous, violent and dominant as ways of playing win-lose games with the planet and people.
- 2 Ecologisation is used to refer to the process of prioritising a relational approach to the Earth, others and the self, that honours the intrinsic value of all life.

- 3 Earth is intentionally capitalised as an acknowledgement of the sentience of the planet as a single, self-regulating organism, aka. Gaia (Lovelock, 1979).
- 4 'Education material' refers to an eight-part workshop process, developed by Hultman and Pulé at Chalmers University, with Vetterfalk from the feminist non-profit organisation MÄN: Men for Gender Equality, founded in Sweden in 1993. The version of the material discussed here focuses on information and embodiment practices customised for men's behaviour and values changes away from violence and towards greater care for the Earth, others and the self.
- 5 We use 'industrial/breadwinner masculinities' close to the concept of breadwinner masculinity often used in feminist studies (Stacey, 1990), to supersede the more familiar, but older, term 'hyper-masculinity' that is defined as the amplification of traditional expressions of masculinities through physical strength, aggression, sexual prowess, military might, domination, being a 'winner', and not being a 'girl' (Kivel, 1999; hooks, 2004; Katz, 2006, 2012, 2016; Hultman and Pulé, 2018). We do so to emphasise the entangled relationship between male domination and industrialisation, and the social and environmental consequences which have proved to be severe. This categorisation represents the most obtuse of 'unmarked' (i.e. normalised) masculinities, the social and environmental impacts of which are obscured by the systems that created and continue to maintain them (Barthes, 1967, p. 77; Reeser, 2010, pp. 8–9; MacGregor and Seymour, 2017).
- 6 Global emissions are taken here to be the principle anthropocentric effluent of modernity.
- 7 Consider that a decade ago, the extractive industry response to a global financial crisis that resulted in a big drop in the use of coal, gas and oil, and the lowering greenhouse emissions was to usher in renewed and accelerated research, development and exploitation of natural resources. In the wake of recent economic crises brought on by COVID-19, the reflex of global regulators has been to prop up international financial mechanisms as the primary line of defence against severe economic collapse once again (Quéré et al., 2020).
- 8 Consider the political intonations along with social and ecological implications of Donald Trump in the US, Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, Narendra Modi in India, Viktor Orbán in Hungary, Benjamin Netanyahu in Israel, Vladimir Putin in Russia, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in Turkey and more, while these individuals were, or remain, in power (Kyle and Gultchin, 2020).
- 9 For detailed instructions and methods on the #AfterMeToo conversation guide, see: MÄN (2018).
- 10 For detailed instructions and methods on the Men in the Climate Crisis conversation guide, see: MÄN (2020).
- 11 Important inspiration and input has been received from Hultman and Pulé (2018), Macy and Johnstone (2012), Swedish ecofeminist Karin Styrén, gendered sustainability researcher Pernilla Hagbert, Transition Network and Earth Rights activist Pella Thiel, Transitions journalist Abigail Sykes and climate justice educators Gustaf Sörnmo and Frida Ekerlund from the organisation Vardagens Civilkurage (Everyday Moral Courage).

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