Masculinity in the Anthropocene:
When climate change intersects with gender and violence

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Safeplaces Network | 20th October 2022

Gender and climate change

- Increasingly understood that climate change is *gendered* – it is driven by, and is exacerbating, unequal gender relations.

- Gender inequality often means women are disproportionately impacted by natural disasters, which in turn can worsen that inequality (Pearse, 2017).

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What about men?

- Who is presiding over the Anthropocene?

- Women make up…

  – 15% of Fortune 500 CEOs (Bucholz, 2022).

  – 22% of govt. ministers (IPU & UN Women, 2020).

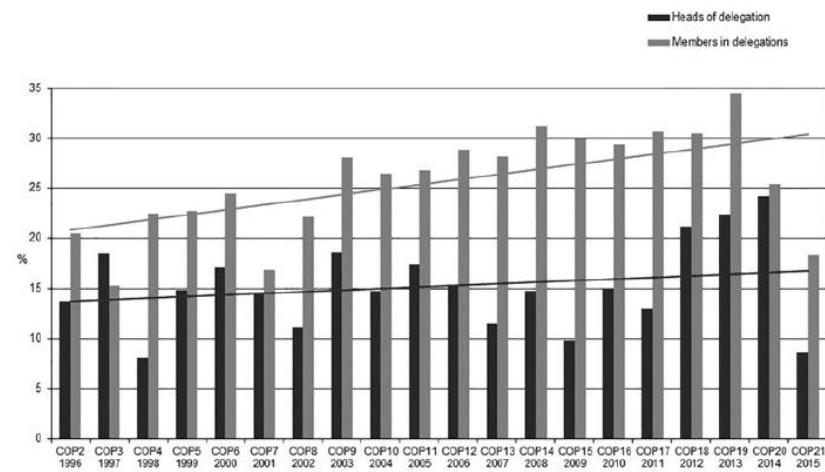 – 15% of environment ministers (IUCN, 2021).

Figure 26.1 Percentage of women delegation heads and members of the UNFCCC Conference of the Parties, 1996–2015

Source: GenderCC (2015)

Adaptation and mitigation

- Who is seen as having the solutions? e.g. science and technology (Nagel, 2017) - 'ecomodern' masculinities (Hultman & Pulé, 2019).

- Voices of those most affected and already possessing solutions frequently marginalised.

- 'Masculinisation' of response (MacGregor, 2009), e.g. focus on male-dominated industrial sectors.

Boris Johnson: Climate change about jobs not 'bunny hugging'

🕐 22 April | 💬 Comments

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The impact of masculine norms

- Most environmentally damaging industries often male-dominated (e.g. 78% of oil/gas workers - Rick et al, 2017).

- Men tend to have bigger carbon footprints (Räty & Carlsson-Kanyama > 2010; Carlsson-Kanyama et al, 2021).

- Many environmentally destructive practices associated with hegemonic masculinities.

- e.g. 'Petro-masculinity' (Daggett, 2018).

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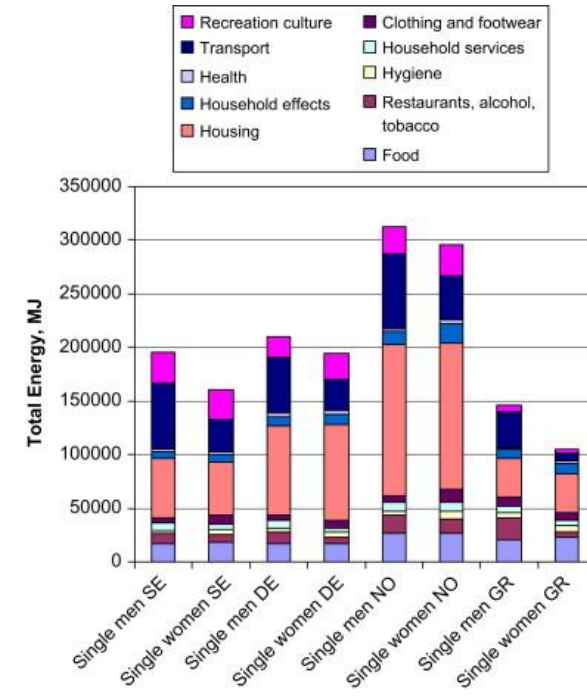
Perceptions of the problem

- Women tend to express more knowledge about climate change, are more likely to see it as a serious threat, and to worry about its effects (Pearson et al, 2017).

- More likely to change their behaviour (ONS, 2021).

- Is caring about the environment seen as '(un)manly'?

SOY BOY: WHAT DOES THIS ONLINE
INSULT MEAN?

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Backlash and 'business as usual'

- Climate change denial dominated by men – threat to masculine identities? (Anshelm & Hultman, 2013)

- Misogyny towards environmentalist activists – overlaps with other forms of backlash.

- 'Business as usual' and business masculinities (Connell & Wood, 2005), e.g. individualism, risk-taking, profit.

- Environment seen as subsidiary concern, and a limit to 'freedoms'.

Tories fighting net zero plans are dragging climate into new culture war, experts say

More than half members of Net Zero Scrutiny Group were also in group that promoted Brexit vote, as fears grow for UK's green agenda

- 'It's all a bit cynical': the politicians behind the Tory attack on net zero agenda

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Masculinity and nature

- Quest for constant growth, conquering of surroundings, exploitation of resources (Mies & Shiva, 2014).

- Sense of ownership of and entitlement to nature.

- 'Rational' detachment from other living things, 'above' nature (Pease, 2019).

- 'Industrial breadwinner' (Hultman & Pulé, 2019).

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Environmental violence

- Men's violences (Kaufman, 1987) and environmental harm/ecocide – shared roots in (masculine) power and control, mutually reinforcing (Pease, 2019).

- Climate change as (slow) violence (Nixon, 2011).

- War and 'treadmills of destruction' (Jorgenson & Clark, 2016).

- Complex - sometimes structural or cultural, sometimes direct (Galtung, 1990).

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Making the connections

- Gender-based violence is often exacerbated during and after natural disasters, e.g. domestic abuse, sexual violence and exploitation (Thurston et al, 2021).

- Violence against environmental activists (Castañeda Camey et al, 2020).

- Increases in violence as temperature warms (Tiihonen et al, 2017).

Record number of environmental activists murdered

By Claire Marshall
BBC Environment & Rural Affairs Correspondent

13 September 2021

Amazon fires

ROB SYMONS, ALL RISE

South African environmental activist Fikile Ntshangase was shot dead in her own home

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Impacts on men and boys

- Men frequently 'victims' of climate breakdown too, e.g. in fire services, prisons.

- Dealing with the trauma, loss, and longer term health issues associated with disasters, e.g. wildfires.

- Increase in substance abuse and suicide (Enarson & Pease, 2016).

- Difficulties accepting and adapting to human anxieties and vulnerabilities.

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Learning from environmentalism

- How do people become involved in environmental activism? And how are wider gender relations challenged and/or reproduced within the movement?

- 20x interviews with environmental activists in the UK.

- Many did grow up with some degree of non-conformity to wider social norms (e.g. wider investments in social justice).

Remaking masculinity

- For many, attachments to nature played an influential role in creating/sustaining their activism.

- For others, it was specifically the climate crisis which instigated their involvement.

- Children often had a big influence.

- Environmentalism appears to involve a 'remaking of the self' (Connell, 1990).

- Fertile ground for gender equality (Westmarland et al, 2021).

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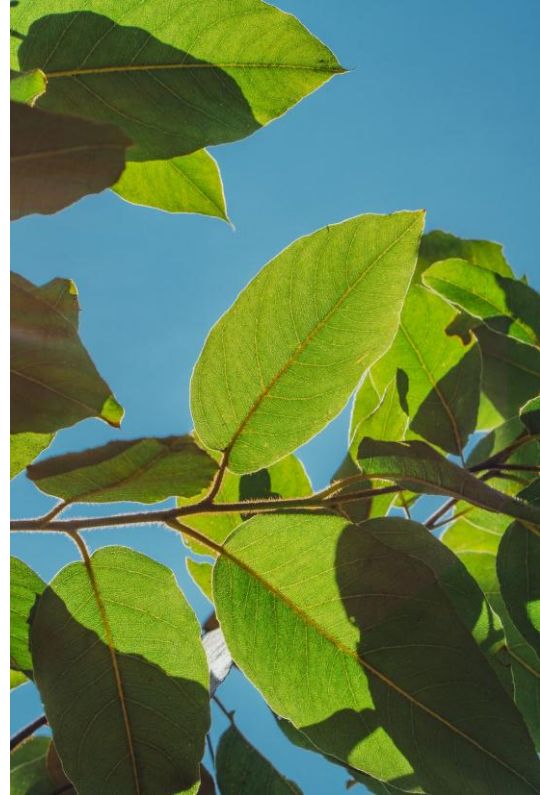
"So I've got three older brothers and when compared with them I'm the like, sensitive one, I'm like, the one who has always sort of always been quite emotive and have always sort of tried to, my brothers would choose to fight over it rather than to talk and I would always choose to talk. That sort of thing. I've always been…I think I've always felt like, there's probably been some pressure to try and, you know, "man up" when looking at things, like how certain things that happen in your life kind of affect you emotionally and whatever else…"

-Nick

The environmental movement

- Highlighted that the environmental movement in many ways does involve defying wider patriarchal norms – and offers an alternative vision for society.

- e.g. Women and LGBTQ+ people playing a decisive role, collective and horizontal organising, non-violence.

- However, some gender norms and inequalities do persist, together with some essentialist perceptions.

"So, in meetings for example a lot of the time there is, it can be fairly male-dominated even when it is not like a male-dominated room. [Laughs] Simply because of, well it's, it's the whole classic stereotype of men being the ones that talk louder and women kind of talk less and think more, which is why it's really important to have facilitators and stuff…"

-Laura

Engaging men and boys

- Approach them 'where they are' – activist spaces may be alienating for some.

- Emphasise the positives, foster dialogue and a sense of agency rather than blame.

- Appeal to range of different skills.

- Need to be cognisant of possible issues.

- Awareness of intersectionality, but challenges putting into practice – climate justice key to engaging wider population.

"*Because it's such a large percentage of society and especially a large percentage of men who watch football, the fact that they were able to transition to green energy, you know, vegan food, all those things, and get people onside, and then get them to eventually go, actually this food's better than what it was before, is a… for me that was quite a like, okay, so there's something there, like they were able to tap into that without, like, people feeling like they were giving up their masculinity, because I think for some people thinking about, you know, re-evaluating their sense of being a man or their sense of what's a manly thing to do or not, it's not going to work for everyone.*"

-Trent

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Prevention work

- What can be learnt from violence prevention work, and vice versa?

- Cultivating interdependence and care for nature can help foster shifts away from violence (Faver, 2010).

- 'Gender-transformative' approaches needed – bringing into question restrictive gender norms which may be obstructing climate action.

Tending to the roots

- Foster skills to critically reflect on our own identities and practices, the impact they have, how they are influenced by society, and how they can shift in healthier directions.

- Utilising eco-pedagogy (Misiaszek, 2021).

- Developing nature-connectedness (Martin et al, 2020) and a reciprocal ethic of care (Pease, 2019) (easier for some than others).

- Opening up what it means to be a man.
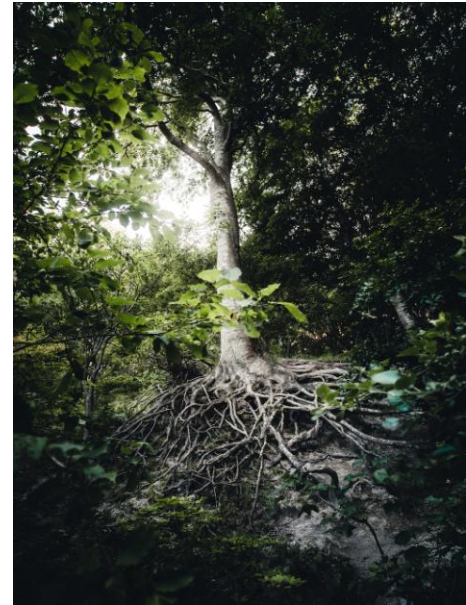
Conclusions

- Prevention requires change at multiple levels - focusing on structures as well as individuals.

- Men and boys can be influential voices for change – and have a responsibility to speak out.

- How are things already shifting?

- Caring for the environment benefits people and planet alike – and can help address the roots of violence.

Thank you for listening!

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- Check out our podcast:
  - 'Now and Men: Current conversations about men's lives' now-and-men.captivate.fm

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