GENDERED ENVIRONMENTAL

THEMES

IN CHILDREN'S MEDIA

By

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Entering the Sociology program was a significant step in furthering my education. Before this program, I had limited knowledge of the sociological world and its differences with the world of natural sciences I grew familiar with during my undergraduate years. I arrived in the midst of a pandemic as well, which brought along its own trials and tribulations. Through all of the challenges, I had a singular goal in mind of continuing my investment in exploring the interactions between people and the natural environment. I did not expect, however, to take on the role of a gender scholar as well. This study was born out of my intellectual pursuits for the environment, but even more so my past where children's cartoons became a significant part of my life. The tools and tricks I gained from growing up in fictional worlds part-time proved invaluable to my study. Beyond these sources of personal passion, this project would not exist without the endless support and guidance I have received from my committee, family, and my friends,

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Abstract: The natural environment is commonly perceived as feminine-oriented by society, however the origins of this orientation remain unclear. This study addresses the gendered lens applied to nature during gender socialization through children's animated television shows in the United States. 52 children's animated series airing from 2000 to 2020 discuss the environment through the use of rhetorical tropes. These series are further examined for reoccurring patterns showing how environmental narratives are gendered within children's animated shows. The results of this study find that feminine-oriented behaviors are most often assigned to pro-environmental sentiments and used to promote environmental action through emotional reasoning tactics. Masculine-oriented behaviors often resulted in inconclusive environmental action or continued notions of eco-friendly behaviors as feminine. In shows without strong masculine or feminine presentations, environmental narratives were more likely shown through characterization or used as an educational tool for younger audiences. These findings can be used in future research exploring the effects of gendered messaging on environmental attitudes throughout life as well as provide a base for continuing this line of research in other cultural regions.

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INTRODUCTION

Environmental themes are often presented as a feminine topic across multimedia from cultural

symbolism like ancient deities and nature spirits to image searches that portray mostly female

activists (Plumwood 2004). In modern society, the feminized image of Mother Nature persists as

one of the most iconic symbols of the natural environment (Roach 2003). By using the moniker

"mother," a title normally associated with the nurturing and overall subordinated social status

women and femininity are placed, nature is often framed as a lesser concern within a society that

is more intensely focused on and valuing of masculine-oriented fields such as business,

economics, and athletics (Liu et al. 2019). While the natural environment is a complex web of

ecological systems, the language and symbolic actions used to teach generations of people have

the strength to shape society's views of nature itself (Cox 2013).

Environmental attitudes exhibit an overall gender divide, particularly in post-industrialization

societies like the United States. This gap, called the "eco-gender gap," outlines a prevalent pattern

in environmental awareness and concern in men and women where the latter is more associated

with pro-environmental behaviors (Normandin 2020). This social pattern is similarly noted in

ecofeminist literature; however, the scholarly focus often discusses the ways the eco-gender gap persists rather than looking at the potential origin or source of the gender-nature dichotomy. Nagel (2015) notes that people are raised with a gender "aesthetic" when discussing the gendered dynamic of climate science and its impacts. This "aesthetic" mentioned by Nagel suggests that the eco-gender gap is shaped by gender socialization. Gender socialization is an ongoing process that constructs our perception of gender roles as well as perpetuate notions of masculinity and femininity (McHale, Crouter, and Whiteman 2003). There are numerous mediums through which gender socialization occurs and the most significant time of this socialization is during childhood (Dill and Thill 2007). One medium that is growing in prevalence during childhood socialization is television media. The purpose of this study is to investigate how language and symbolism may be used to socially-construct the environment as feminine, particularly during childhood socialization through animated television.

Television media had been utilized in previous research for both environmental perspectives and childhood socialization, but the two are rarely examined together. While previous research on the environment and media has focused on news media, there is a growing body of literature looking at the influence of popular media in constructing social norms during childhood socialization. The capacity of popular media influence has continued to gain attention and grow as wider availability increases television viewership by younger generations (Council on Communications and Media 2011; Nielsen 2020; Sullivan and Molay 2020). Animated television and movies aimed at younger demographics have been studied to observe their role in teaching children social norms regarding beliefs and behaviors associated with gender roles (Bazzini et al. 2010; Coyne et al. 2016). These norms are often taught through subliminal messaging found within rhetorical tropes that commonly reoccur in television series and films (Martin and Kazyak 2009; Xu et al. 2019). Rhetorical tropes are storytelling narratives that commonly reoccur across various forms of popular media. These tropes present themselves in character presentation, dialogue, and

interaction with other elements shown in the scene and are not limited strictly to gender role portrayal. By observing the ways that gendered language and behaviors are used in rhetorical tropes, children's media may be a useful tool for understanding how gender socialization also impacts other social perceptions and constructs.

To better understand the interplay between gender and environmental attitudes, television media can be examined to assess environmental concern and widespread collective action as it is conceptualized during early periods of socialization. Children are taught a lot about how society functions from a diverse range of animated shows and movies, from general socialization to learning dominant gender norms (Martin and Kazyak 2009). By using rhetorical tropes to identify children's popular media messaging about socio-environmental relationships, I conduct a content analysis study of children's animated television shows to examine the gendered themes surrounding subjects addressing the natural environment. I utilized a grounded theory approach with analytical coding and memoing to determine patterns of environmental themes representing masculinity and femininity in 52 animated television series made for younger age demographics in the past twenty years. By looking at more contemporary, readily-available media forms, further implications can be made about the possible ramifications of socially constructing socio-environmental perspectives through a gendered lens. The term "environment" will be used synonymously with the terms "natural environment" and "nature" throughout this study. The scholarly literature framing this study address previous observations and theories connecting gender and the natural environment as well as the role of the media in environmental communication and childhood socialization.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Gender and the Environment

To understand how social researchers began to examine the socially constructed feminine

characteristics of the environment and its impacts, it is important to historically contextualize the

modern environmental movement. In particular, the roles of women during the movement

established observable gender patterns associated with environmental behaviors. Women often

led local and national environmental movement activities. The catalyst for the modern

environmental movement, particularly in regards to the U.S. movement of the 1970s, was *Silent*

Spring, written by female ecologist Rachel Carson (1962) in response to the ecological impacts of

toxic chemicals like DDT. After publishing, Carson played a significant role in raising public

awareness towards the dangers of these chemicals, eventually leading to the banning of DDT use

and establishment of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Women were at the

forefront of movement activities addressing local disasters like Love Canal, in which chemical

waste was linked to severe health risks and birth defects within the community (Beck 1979; Hay

2009; Rosner 2009). Today, women still tend to be more environmentally conscious of issues like

anthropogenic climate change (Nagel 2015) and nations with higher percentages of women in

government office are more likely to ratify environmental treaties (Norgaard and York 2005).

Connecting the present study's focus on younger demographics to gender and the environment, Greta Thunberg's work as a Swedish climate activist represents active participation by both women and younger generations. Her participation and leadership in environmental activities such as climate strikes gained worldwide recognition, leading her to be named Time's Person of the Year in 2019 (Alter, Hayes, and Worland 2019). Not only was Greta Thunberg widely recognized as an activist, but she also set the stage for more young activists to gain notice (Parker 2020). Recent research shows an increase in environmental collective action for individuals, both male and female, with familiarity of Thunberg's actions (Jung et al. 2020; Sabherwal et al. 2021). By focusing on younger age demographics, this study can identify patterns found within popular media that constructs these environmental attitudes within younger generations.

In addition to the physical aspect of female involvement, the environment has been most commonly associated with traditionally feminine imagery and language (Plumwood 2004). Searches for environmental topics and themes in areas such as educational material often result in images of women, children, and other female-associated symbols like flowers and the iconic Mother Nature figure (Carvalho et al. 2011; Reynolds and Haslam 2011; Roach 2003). The image of Mother Nature itself can be traced back to civilizations like the Ancient Greeks and the goddesses Demeter and Persephone. In addition, nations like the United States often viewed nature as something wild that needed to be dominated which is a stereotypically masculine view that can be compared with the domination and control of women by their male family members (Chapple and Chapple 1994; Radford Ruether 1995). This association between women and the environment has led to studies focusing on the field of ecofeminism (Mallory 2018; Plumwood 2004), positioning the female-oriented imagery towards nature in association with feminist thought and support (Smith 2001).

The Ecofeminist Perspective

Paralleling increased concerns for environmental welfare, feminist social movements also gained traction during the 1960s and 1970s in the United States. During this time, ecofeminism became a significant sociological framework exploring the intersection of feminism and environmentalism. The main idea of ecofeminism is to encourage women's connections to nature, challenge existing human vs. non-human beliefs, and use it as grounds for environmental consciousness and activism. This combination makes ecofeminism essential to consider in this study (Glazebrook 2002). Trish Glazebrook (2008) examined the history of ecofeminist thought with some of the main points to connecting feminism and environmentalism as well as some of the critiques of ecofeminist thought, particularly in reference to the ecofeminist literature from Karen Warren(Warren 1990, 1997, 2000). Some critiques of ecofeminist thought have held the stance that environmental concerns are a mere backdrop for a broader debate surrounding gender inequalities (Alaimo 2008), but many still hold that environmental protections should be important for feminism to combat prevailing notions of masculinized domination and subjugation of nature (Glazebrook 2002). The main idea of ecofeminism expresses the notion that "everything is connected" inasmuch as environmental degradation and other concerns impacts society as much as it impacts the natural environment (Cuomo 2002; Glazebrook 2002). Ecofeminist thought pushes to link environmental awareness with "human tendencies toward compassion and caring" (Cuomo 2002). However, the emphasis on women's connection with nature led to other researcher asking how to expand ecofeminist rhetoric to all gender identities (Banerjee and Bell 2007). These thoughts have since been adapted in recent research introducing "ecological masculinity" as a means to reconnect men with nature by embracing emotional and physical vulnerability that is considered to be unmanly yet important for approaching environmental concerns (Brough et al. 2016; Pease 2019).

While ecofeminism is intricately complex, the themes represented by ecofeminist thought align themselves with this study to give some theoretical insight to the relationship between femininity, gender dynamics, and environmental attitudes. This perspective serves to both recognize where environmental awareness is being championed as well as a position of further evidence of a gendered perspective of the environment. Ecofeminism seemingly operates on traditionally feminine-oriented perspectives of the environment and in several cases recognizes society's tendency to view nature as something to be dominated much like the more antiquated views of women as property, particularly after marriage. In this light, the action of gendering the environment can be taken from a more positive perspective and pushed forward as feminist concerns are recognized by modern society. Instead of changing the stigma surrounding the environment as a feminine subject, ecological feminism provides ground for arguing that environmentalism is important regardless of society's gendered perspectives. As society works to be more inclusive and less rigid about gender dynamics and norms, environmental issues might be seen on equal ground to more masculine societal concerns like the economy. Ecological feminism provides support in developing codes that are based on a femininity-masculinity spectrum as opposed to a gender binary system.

Nature as a Social Construct

The previous discussion represents just a fraction of the literature showing the significance of gender in conversation with environmental concerns. The means that society use to create and maintain the association between women and the environment have limited research. The language and rhetoric surrounding society's perception of the natural world may play a significant causal role for gendered patterns in environmental concern. Human perception of what defines nature and the natural environment is constructed based on sociocultural dynamics. Cultural values and language play an integral role in constructing this social-symbolic perspective of nature and generate the ways in which society determines what constitutes an

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environmental problem (Cox 2013). Even as people are physically impacted by nature, the symbolic actions and gestures used have the ability to affect and construct the ways that society perceives the natural world.

Historically, the natural environment has been communicated through a gendered lens as we see in popular symbols like Mother Nature. During the age of North American colonialist explorations, documents described how pioneers "broke virgin land" and cleared "virgin forests" when traveling across the continent (Bell and Ashwood 2016). This metaphor is one example of nature being communicated as something to be dominated by society, using masculine rhetoric mainly associated with men's superiority over and ownership of women. Previous studies on how gender is seen in modern structures such as the World Bank and the discipline of climate science as a whole (Kurian 2017) suggest that even as environmental concern becomes more mainstream, the feminine characteristics associated with nature still persist and affect the way environmental problems are perceived and addressed.

Environmental education also tends to foster pro-environmental attitudes through the cultivation of a student's emotional and social intelligence. The goal of this form of environmental learning, also known as ecoliteracy, is for students to understand ecological systems, see environmental concerns from other people's perspectives, and develop an empathy for all living beings (Goleman, Bennett, and Barlow 2012). Emotions and understanding other people tend to be associated with the female sphere, presenting another dimension where environmental attitudes are inherently affected by gendered perceptions. This gendered association of the natural world as feminine is deeply rooted in the way Western society presents the relationship between humans and nature. This association thus could persist from generation to generation subconsciously throughout socialization and continue to affect how current and future generations construct their own definitions of the natural environment. Since gender is a known social construct, one

significant period of time where it could impact society's views of the natural environment is during childhood when gender socialization is the most formative and impactful.

Biocentrism and Anthropocentrism

One example of gender impacting the social construction of the natural environment can be found in studies looking at two prominent ideologies in tandem that reflect society's perception of nature. Biocentrism, also sometimes referred to as ecocentrism, focuses on humans and the environment being considered as equals. This framework poses that humans have a moral duty to protect the natural environment to avoid hurting sentient beings, whether human or non-human, as well as uphold the purity of the natural world (Rottman 2014). Anthropocentrism, on the other hand, focuses on "promoting the welfare of humans" over non-sentient or non-living beings (Rottman 2014). This ideology is seen in society through ecological services that promote conservationist techniques that purportedly protect the environment while also providing a service for humans through resource use and oftentimes recreation.

The distinction between biocentrism and anthropocentrism will act as a foundation for coding in this study due to previous research on both perspectives displaying strong patterns regarding gender stereotypical association. Both of these ideologies have been previously studied using a gendered lens with biocentrism being largely regarded as feminine and anthropocentrism as masculine based on symbolic language and gender demographics (Altun 2020; Batra 1996; Calvo-Salguero et al. 2014; Quinn, Castéra, and Clément 2016). When looking at both perspectives from a gender spectrum as opposed to masculinity-femininity, anthropocentrism was the only one of the two that could be predicted by gender as well as masculinity while femininity was an observed predictor for biocentrism (Calvo-Salguero et al. 2014). While the research study did not further explore possible reasons for the gender predictors to be different between ideologies, another study conducted by Brough and colleagues found that the association of pro-

environmental behavior as feminine discouraged male participation because it was perceived as unmanly (Brough et al. 2016). An important distinction to note, however, is that neither gender nor levels of masculinity or femininity impacted pro-environmental behaviors in children, but rather whether they were taught through biocentric or anthropocentric narratives (Altun 2020). This suggests that these two ideologies have a noteworthy impact on environmental attitudes early on and gender becomes a more salient factor later in life. A study conducted in 2016 by Quinn and colleagues found evidence showing more female educators exhibiting biocentric, labeled as non-anthropogenic in the study, behaviors and positive attitudes towards the natural environment (Quinn et al. 2016), further evidencing gender socialization's role in constructing environmental attitudes as educators are considered a significant actor during childhood socialization. As such, the present study supports approaches the gendering of the environment with a coding scheme focused on masculinity and femininity rather than a male-female dichotomy using these two ideologies as an initial guide for analyzing narratives within popular media.

Gender Socialization and the Media

Gender is understood as a social construct influenced by norms and behaviors thought to be associated with biological sex, though there is much discourse as to how much of gender is a biological construct rather than social (Xue 2008). Today, we see growing movements towards undoing gender norms due to the true complexities of understanding relationships between biological sex, gender identities, and other factors influencing gendered perceptions. Even as the idea of gender identity and presentation expands with gender creative parenting approached, the social construction of gender currently remains largely static as humans learn about norms and behaviors associated with gender during their childhood from their peers and educators as well as their family. The process by which gender is socially constructed is known as gender socialization and serves as another significant theoretical framework for this study as it pertains to

how gendered rhetoric can influence environmental attitudes. Gender socialization itself has no singular mode of operation as children's knowledge and understanding of male-female differences are influenced by multiple actors including family, peers and caregivers (Eckes and Trautner 2000; Stockard 2006). Girls are often encouraged to wear skirts and dresses and are often expected to be demure and behaved. Boys, on the other hand, are rarely chastised for rowdy behavior but are discouraged from engaging in more feminine forms of play like messing with dolls or playing house (Martin 1998). Ethnicity is also noted to play a role as studies have shown differences in gender expectations as well as presenting instances of perpetuating more traditional gender stereotypes (Raffaelli and Ontai 2004). One study effectively connects different gender constructs to nature in observing environmental impacts to the masculinity of indigenous fishermen from the Karuk tribe in California because feeding their families was seen as masculine duties (Norgaard, Reed, and Bacon 2018). These differences show the dynamic nature of gender socialization as it changes based on many different factors such as a person's household or culture.

One vehicle for gender socialization gaining more attention is popular media. Television shows and movies are often used to determine and enforce gender roles, from formulaic boy-meets-girl stories to underdog hero tales. Discounting actual viewership, most television media sources have intended gender demographics, similar to how Legos and Hot Wheels are marketed for boys and Barbies for girls (Kahlenberg and Hein 2010). Coltrane and Adams (1997) analyzed gender role portrayal regarding work-family imagery in everyday television, observing that there has been little change over time in regards to the roles played by men and women where men are portrayed as the breadwinners while women are often homemakers. Gender demographics where media is distinguished for boys or girls specifically are seen the most in children's media with series like Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles and Disney Princess films being seen as encouraging gender stereotypes. Television advertising has also been cited by researchers as reinforcing gender

stereotypes, especially those geared towards women where they are portrayed as young, dependent, and/or nurturing (Kahlenberg and Hein 2010; Kim and Lowry 2005; Pike and Jennings 2005). Due to the increasing ease of access, children and adolescents are spending more time in front of a television or computer screen than before (Nielsen 2020; Sullivan and Molay 2020). In 2013, the American Academy of Pediatrics cited television to as a significant influencer for children and teenagers (Council on Communications and Media 2011). As such, there is growing concern over the years regarding the impact media content has on younger generations.

By preschool, children have been found to already have preconceived notions about dominant gender roles (Golden and Jacoby 2018; Martin 1998) from multiple sources including home, school, and visual media. In regards to gender, digital media plays a significant role in how children perceive gender roles and stereotypes. There are many previous studies regarding the specific influences of Disney media on gender roles, especially in regards to the animated Disney Princess movies like *Cinderella* or *Sleeping Beauty*. These films and other media sources have been researched and proven to influence young girls' views of femininity, gender roles in society, as well as affect their perception of beauty and romance (Bazzini et al. 2010; Coyne et al. 2016; England, Descartes, and Collier-meek 2011; Martin and Kazyak 2009; Xu et al. 2019) and despite movements toward less stereotypical princess images these perceptions by young girls have hardly changed (Dundes 2020; Hine, Ivanovic, and England 2018). While a majority of this research has been done on media influence with young girls, a study by Common Sense Media conducted in 2017 showed that young boys were impacted just as much through stereotypes of men as muscular, aggressive, and sexually-driven (Common Sense Media 2017). As such, the portrayal of gender in popular media does play a major role in how younger people navigate social expectations and is often where visual attempts to change gendered perception have occurred to varying degrees of success (Dundes 2020; Jane 2015; Turchi and Bernabo 2020).

This study utilizes previous research on gender socialization in popular media, particularly in animated media, to ascertain gender patterns when specifically addressing environmental topics.

Research Question

Questions about the impact of engendering the environment are still ongoing in present research. While there is a correlation between the environment and feminine imagery as well as the presence of well-known female activists, little has been done to investigate the origins of this association with gender or its impacts when the natural environment is discussed. The media plays a key role in presenting both gender and environmental attitudes, however previous research on environmental issues has focused on news media and largely left out more comprehensive studies on environmental narratives in popular media (Anderson 1997; Angelou 2011; Cox 2013). As environmental themes become more mainstream, popular media has included more nature-focused programming and storylines that often include children as a target demographic. The present study is guided by the following research question: *How are environmental narratives represented through a gendered lens in children's animated media?* This question explores whether or not environmental themes in popular are presented alongside gender norms that could affect the social construction of environmental attitudes through socialization. To effectively compare previous research on gender in children's media with this analysis, animated children's shows have been selected as the analytical sample.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Population of Children's Animated Media

Based on previous research examining gender socialization in television media, this study focuses on animated television shows created for younger age demographics that emphasize environmental themes. Previous studies on the effects of visual media on gender socialization during childhood have primarily focused on animation, particularly Disney films, which informs the decision to focus on animated media (Bazzini et al. 2010; England et al. 2011; Martin and Kazyak 2009). The total population of this study is also limited to series airing from 2000 to 2020 in order to explore the influence of the media on contemporary young adults as well as future generations. Since the modern environmental movement occurred in the 1970s, environmental concern has become a mainstream aspect of society and is more likely to be addressed directly and indirectly in popular media from the 2000s onward. Subscription services such as Netflix and Hulu are a major factor in sourcing this study's analytic sample focus on readily-available, accessible content for kids and families.

Previous research has shown the effectiveness of using storytelling narratives to teach and encourage environmental behaviors from a young age. For instance, one study shows that preschoolers taught about the environment through stories stated more biocentric than

anthropocentric views of the environment regardless of gender (Altun 2020). TVTropes.org was used in this study to identify the series and units of analysis that fit the research criteria of containing environmental themes. TVTropes is a public information source that gathers pop culture media and breaks down different rhetorical tropes that are often used in crafting narratives (TV Tropes 2021). The term "trope" within the context of the study refers to common storytelling themes and stereotypes found in most forms of fictional media. These tropes are developed collaboratively by a community of fans and researchers and monitored by a small staff that maintains the database. Tropes were utilized to find shows and movies that fit the analytic scope of the present study. Multiple tropes from TVTropes's database were chosen to collect data for this analysis, including examples such as "Green Aesop," "Green Thumb," and "Friend to all Living Things." Each trope category was chosen based on its application to environmental themes, which in this context means subject matter referencing the natural environment and its inhabitants as well as the relationship between humans and nature. Keywords for selecting specific tropes include: "green" in the natural environment sense, "nature," "plants" and/or "animals" with the inclusion of "living things," and "Gaia," the primordial goddess of the earth, to determine the tropes used for this study. The tropes used for this study serve as an initial filter for identifying the analytic sample from the broader population of animated children's media for this study and are defined in Table 1. Television programming airs new programs constantly, thus isolating programs that are known to present these socio-environmental themes is necessary to construct an analytic sample that contains theoretically relevant dialogue for analysis.

After determining which tropes would serve as the analytical inclusion criteria, data was collected by utilizing the "Western Animation" lists for each rhetorical trope. These lists identify series most likely to be available for analysis because they were produced in Western Europe and North America. These titles were then filtered using the Internet Movie Database (IMDb) to identify which series on the lists fit the twenty-year timeframe and the child age demographic, the latter

determined by the series' television rating. Sixty children's animated series titles met the study's inclusion criteria.

Data Collection

While 60 series were identified through the inclusion criteria, the final analytical sample for this study was 52. The 8 series not included in the study were unavailable through local streaming sources. The top age ratings for the sample are TV-Y, TV-Y7, and TV-Y7-FV and most aired on well-known children's networks such as Nickelodeon, Cartoon Network, and Disney, all as shown in Table 2. Series with the NR rating have not been evaluated using the TV rating system in the United States. These series were created outside of the US, but were available for analysis through streaming platforms. The tropes with the most occurrences in the analytical sample were "Friend to All Living Things" and "Green Aesop." Table 1.1 provides frequencies of television series within all tropes with potential analytical relevance mainly represented through character traits, Table 1.2 provides series within tropes mainly represented through series or episode narratives, and Table 2 addresses secondary criteria applied to identify the final analytic sample. (see Appendix A for complete list of television series included in the analytic sample).

Most environmental tropes did not apply to all the episodes within each TV series. In order to properly evaluate each series, episodes within the series will be the units of analysis used for coding. When identified for the presence of rhetorical tropes, several series had specific episodes listed while the rest named qualifying elements such as characters, locations, or general plotlines alone. Series with the latter description required further examination to identify episodes with the highest likelihood of analytical relevance. When these elements were present for the entire series duration, such as through character representation or as a major narrative within the series itself, a maximum of 6 qualifying episodes were selected at random using a random number generator for analysis.

Table 1.1 Analytic Inclusion Criteria – Characterization Tropes

Identified Trope	Trope Definition	Sample Frequency (n=52)*
Animal Lover	A character is shown to have a love for all animals, whether or not the animals like them back.	9
Fertile Feet	A character that is identified as a potent force of good so powerful that flowers grow wherever they walk.	2
Flowers of Nature	A character that is adorned with flowers or has flowers as a personal motif to show their love or nature or their innate affinity to grow plants.	3
Friend to All Living Things	A character is shown to be almost supernaturally innocent, sweet, altruistic, or any combination thereof, by wild forest creatures flocking to them.	19
Green Thumb	The power of supernatural control of plants by means like superpowers or magic.	12
Nature Hero	A hero who lives largely in isolation from human civilization in the wild. They have a strong affinity with and appreciation for the local wildlife and can communicate with them easily and have them listen to their requests.	1
Nature-Loving Robot	A robot character that expresses appreciation of and an affinity for the natural environment, potentially including the natural ability to attract animals to them.	2
Nature Lover	Those who love the great outdoors and all that dwell therein.	1
Nature Spirit	A mythical being with a direct tie to nature.	3

*Table 1.1. Tropes identified through TVTrope.org that establish human-nature relationships through character traits and the frequency of TV shows that contain each rhetorical trope after applying age demographics and timeframe constrains *TV series for each trope are not mutually exclusive*

Table 1.2 Analytic Inclusion Criteria – Narrative-Driven Tropes

Identified Trope	Trope Definition	Sample Frequency (n=52)*
Green Aesop	A story that has a moral message about protecting the environment.	13
Gaia's Lament	A story set in a futuristic Earth or similar setting where plants, animals, and clean water are no longer present due to some sort of environmental catastrophe – natural and/or man-made – and the world is left a barren wasteland.	1
Gaia's Vengeance	Humans have messed up the natural balance of the world so badly and nature is fighting back.	5
In Harmony With Nature	A character or society that, either by nature or study, understands nature's rhythms and resources very well and lives accordingly.	2
Nature Equals Plants	While all the elements are theoretically part of nature, series with a cast boasting magical abilities where most if not all are element-based classify "nature powers" as plant-based.	1
Nature is Not Nice	When a work's creator chooses to subvert the romanticized image of nature as harmonious and maternal by portraying its uglier aspects: the horror, danger, amorality, and ruthlessness of untamed nature that works tend to gloss over.	2

*Table 1.2. Tropes identified through TVTrope.org that establish human-nature relationships through narrative themes, and the frequency of TV shows that contain each rhetorical trope after applying age demographics and timeframe constrains *TV series for each trope are not mutually exclusive*

Data Analysis

As there is limited literature regarding the exploration of the gendering within environmental messaging in children's media, I approached the analysis using a grounded theory methodology with open, axial, and focused coding to develop an overview of narrative elements that could shape environmental perspectives through a gendered lens (Heath and Cowley 2004; Lai and To 2015; Locke 2002). To gather as much information as possible to begin developing the codebook in the open-coding stage, three series from each rating bracket were randomly selected using a number generator. Two rating brackets, TV-G and TV-14, had one series included in this step because only one series was identified in the analytical sample. I analyzed each applicable

episode from the selected TV series using analytical memos to observe each interaction between
the characters and their respective environmental theme(s)

Table 2. Secondary Criteria Frequencies

Category	Type	Frequency (n=52)
Rating		
	Not Rated (NR)	3
	TV-G	1
	TV-Y	13
	TV-Y7	17
	TV-Y7-FV	1
	TV-14	1
Network		
	Nickelodeon	13
	Cartoon Network	18
	Disney	6
	PBS Kids	3
	Discovery Family/The Hub	6
	Other	8
Air Dates*	2000-2005	14
	2006-2010	16
	2011-2015	17
	2016-present	5

*Table 2. Criteria applied after identifying potentially relevant series to determine the final
analytic sample. *Air dates identified as the year a series began airing.*

as well as the general depiction of the natural environment itself. One example of this analytical
memoing approach comes from my analysis of the episode "Steven's Lion" from *Steven Universe
(2013-2019)*. In this episode, the main protagonist Steven quickly bonds with a pink lion during a
desert expedition with his guardians. I first took note of scenes with interactions between Steven
and Lion, before examining Steven's specific dialogue and behaviors. While Steven typically
shows feminine behaviors towards the environment such as using nature to show why Earth
should be protected or using his healing powers to regrow fields of flowers, he expresses his more
masculine side while claiming that the lion is his new pet and best friend, showing frustration
whenever he tries to command the lion to do something or answer him when the lion refuses to do

so. By the end of the episode, Steven grows to understand that even if the lion is his friend, they are also an independent creature that viewed protecting Steven as more important than being a pet.

After applying this analytic memoing technique to the selected TV series, I developed axial and focused codes following along two pathways: a series code and an episode code. The series code was established to ensure that each series' analysis was weighed equally despite the different number of episodes per series. This code used more focused lines of questioning and observation to determine overall patterns that could more readily be compared with one another. The questions for the series code focused on categorical elements that were less likely to change from episode to episode, such as the gender identities of the show's primary cast, the masculinity or femininity of a show's visual palette, whether or not environmental themes were presented through characters, narratives, or both, and how the eco-positive characters or themes are represented within the show. The visual palette, for example, was identified as masculine, feminine, balanced, or androgynous based on a combination of the show's color story, the graphic design, and the gender identity composition of the primary cast as presented in Table 3. The episode code expanded on the previous topics examined in the series code in order to find more details that present opportunities for a gendered analysis of environmental elements that might not be present in other series. This code looks into details such as specific environmental problems, characteristics of antagonizing forces where applicable, and the depiction of the environment through the words and actions of the main characters. The categories within both codebooks were greatly informed by notions of biocentrism and anthropocentrism in looking at the portrayal of environmental issues, environmental messaging, and the interpretation of characters that act as allies and antagonists towards the environmental message within both the series and episode codebooks. After establishing both codebooks, the codes were then applied to

the remaining TV series in the analytical sample. The process of data collection resulted in

expansion of the existing episode

Table 3. Visual Demographic Code

Visual Demographic	Color Palette	Graphic Design	Series Examples
Feminine	Color tones tend to be more pastel with focus pinks, purples, and lighter shades of other major colors	Abundance of feminine-oriented details such as flowers and butterflies, softer line work overall, and emphasis on feminine-oriented characters	*She-Ra Princesses of Power* *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic* *Winx Club*
Masculine	Color tones tend to be bold and/or dark with emphasis on primary colors and heavy black outlines	Bold, comic-book style design with heavy black outlines and emphasis on masculine-oriented characters	*Danny Phantom* *Ben 10* *TMNT (2012)*
Balanced	Color tones are either a mix of masculine and feminine or somewhere in-between	Mix of feminine and masculine graphics, often with more detail in the background imagery	*Avatar The Last Airbender* *Steven Universe*
Androgynous	Color tones are either very basic or bright and bold primary and neon shades.	Graphics are simpler with no clear focus on gendered imagery.	*Dora the Explorer* *Fishtronaut*

Table 3. Description pattern examples for coding the visual demographic of each series

code to encompass patterns and details that were less frequent in the analytical memo stage. If a

line of code includes the identification of a characteristic or demographic as masculine or

feminine, results are labeled balanced if there is a clear representation of both gender expressions

in equal proportions and androgynous if results do not strongly lean either direction. Since gender

and gender presentation are socially constructed, there is no exact measure for masculinity and

femininity. This study's analysis uses gender roles, expectations, and stereotypes common to

Westernized nations because these series are produced in North America and Western Europe.

Some of these stereotypes include submissive caretaking and nurturing roles associated with

femininity while masculinity is often associated with leadership and dominance (Blakemore

2003; Scarborough and Sin 2020; Swim et al. 2020). Femininity is often associated with "soft"

emotions like kindness and sadness while masculinity is more commonly represented by anger

and aggression. While "soft" emotions such as the capacity to care for both people and nature is

not exclusive to women, scholarly research supports the notion that current perceptions of

masculinity cause a separation between men and their acknowledgement of their caring side

(Pease 2019). (See Figure 1: Coding for a visual guide to how the different levels of coding were
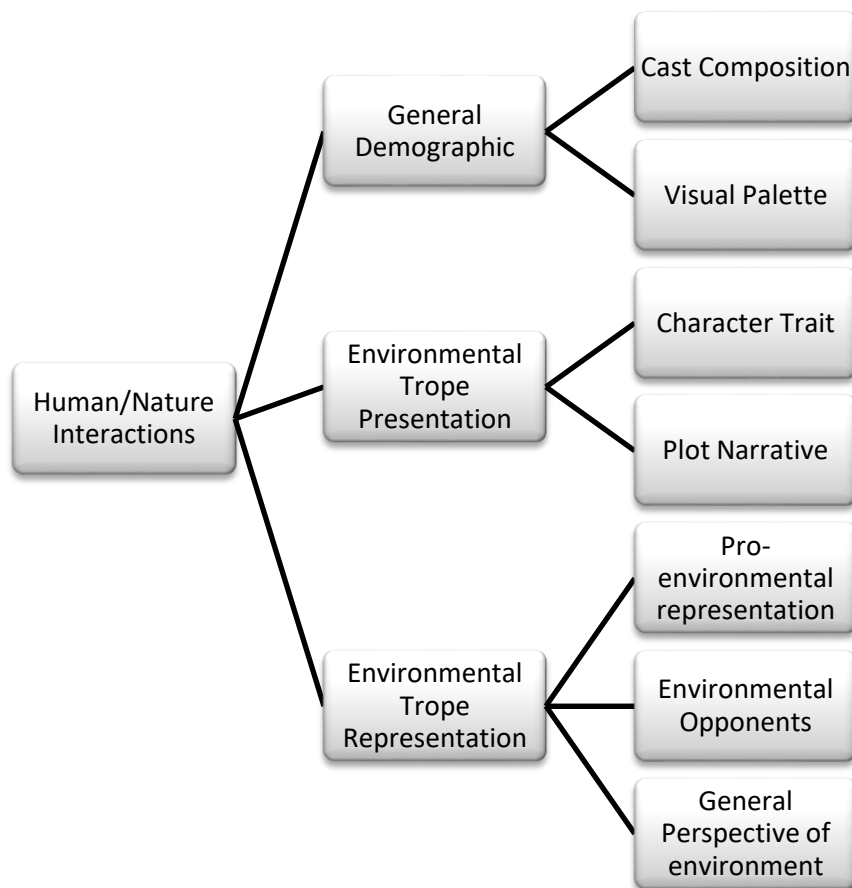
developed)

Figure 1. Coding – A visual representation of how the coding was constructed for this study's

analysis

Positionality

The timeframe of the current study coincides with my childhood experiences and many series within the analytic sample were a part of my television experience growing up. By establishing this fact, I do have prior knowledge of many TV series analyzed within this study as well as a strong background in environmental studies. Despite taking measures to limit bias within the study, I acknowledge that these experiences likely hold some weight during observation and analysis.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Analysis

The findings for this study's analysis will be presented in four sections divided into the following

areas. The first two sections focus on recurring observations made that are regarded as strongly

feminine and masculine respectively. Series within these two categories were relatively

straightforward in identifying feminine and masculine behaviors applied to environmental tropes.

As my analysis continued, however, it became apparent that a group of series within the analytic

sample could not be categorized as clearly. These series were coded as either balanced or

androgynous depending on the presence or absence of identifiably strong feminine and/or

masculine patterns. Observations for these two categories make up the third section of my

findings. The final section discusses a thematic recurrence in reasoning tactics from across the

entire analytic sample regardless of demographic coding.

Feminine Presentation and Natural Connections

  In the analytic sample, 11 series were coded as feminine and 1 balanced series was

identified as feminine-leaning based on the primary cast, color palette, and graphic design

characteristics making up the visual code. Patterns emerged during data analysis supporting

ongoing associations between female and feminine-presenting characters and positive interactions

In the analytic sample, 11 series were coded as feminine and 1 balanced series was identified as feminine-leaning based on the primary cast, color palette, and graphic design characteristics making up the visual code. Patterns emerged during data analysis supporting ongoing associations between female and feminine-presenting characters and positive interactions with the natural environment. TV series with character-driven themes such as "Animal Lover," "Green Thumb," or "Nature Lover" were more often represented by female characters or characters with feminine characteristics such as Steven from the titular *Steven Universe*. In samples with a majority female cast such as *Winx Club (2004-2019)*, *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic (2010-2019)*, and *She-Ra: Princesses of Power (2018-2020)*, the characters showing the most concern for the natural environment appear to be the ones with the most feminine personality and/or behavior patterns. These individuals are often the maternal figure within their respective friend groups, driven by concern for the well-being of those under their care, and when faced with conflict prefer a more peaceful if not outright passive approach. They are often known for being more soft-spoken and appear to defer to more logical or masculine characters when faced with difficult situations. In the "Flowers for She-Ra" episode of *She-Ra: Princesses of Power (2018-2020)*, Perfuma is introduced as a princess with the power to manipulate plant life and welcomes the help of the main character, Adora, to save the Tree of Life from being killed by bio-poison. Despite having powers of her own, Perfuma enforces peace, prosperity, and pacifism and leans on She-Ra, Adora's princess of power transformation, as a more masculine figure aligned with ideals of power and protection. Adora scolds Perfuma and her village for not doing their part to protect their home and by the end Perfuma endorses fighting back to protect their homes. Even as Perfuma shows more willingness to fight for Etheria, the show's primary setting, she still holds back negative feelings and prefers non-violence when possible. Later on in the series episode "The Valley of the Lost," Perfuma surprises everyone when she finally breaks down yelling "I hate cacti! There I said it! I love and honor all things except cacti!" (15:00) The other characters seemed more taken aback that her breakdown was about her inability to

communicate with cacti than the irritation at the negative attitudes of the Crimson Wastes residents. Similar emotional expressions of doubt and negativity are often met with surprise in other shows as well because feminine-oriented characters tend to be presented as the optimistic members that look for the good in others, including antagonizing characters.

In regards to their environmental viewpoints, characters within this group are often the most connected to nature through magical talents such as communicating with plants or animals and being able to call upon them for assistance. Within feminine stereotypes, the presentation of these abilities relates to the idea that women are more adept at relationship-building than men. Fluttershy, a yellow pegasus with a long pink mane and pink butterflies on her flank, in *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic (2010-2019)* has difficulties speaking to others, particularly to more talkative characters like the athletic Rainbow Dash or the party-loving Pinkie Pie, and tends to be outspoken only when animals are involved since her special talent is communicating with animals. In the pilot episode "Friendship is Magic, Part 1," Fluttershy can barely tell the series protagonist Twilight Sparkle her name because of her shyness, but immediately changes when she sees Spike, Twilight's dragon assistant, and excitedly asks about him and introduces herself to Spike. In *Winx Club (2004-2019)*, the primary female cast each has a magic ability associated with some natural force like fire, water, or sound, but the character that presents the most environmental concern is Flora, the eponymous Fairy of Nature with the ability to communicate with most forms of plant life. Flora, whose name translates to "flower" in Latin, is commonly presented as the maternal figure in the group and the only group member with a sibling, a younger sister named Miele whom she dotes over and is willing to sacrifice herself to protect in the episode "The Black Willow's Tears." In the season one episode "The Black Mud Swamp," the primary cast is exploring a swamp not far from the Alfea College for Fairies to learn how to navigate by listening to nature. Of the group, Flora and the series protagonist Bloom are the only ones who can hear the voice of nature because they are both more attuned to their surroundings.

Paralleling the girls as they go through their lesson is a group of male heroes from the neighboring Red Fountain School for Heroes. The heroes crash landed in the swamp after they lost a prisoner during transport and later on are strung up by magical vines. The main characters hear the heroes yelling for help and find them, Flora gently scolding them for yelling and fighting the vines. According to Flora, that species of vines hates loud noises and she works to pacify the plants as the heroes are released after following her directions. Her ability as the Fairy of Nature often puts her in the role of communicating with nature to fulfil tasks and help the cast find their way through wild terrain. This communication, pair with her characterization as a maternal figure and relatively submissive in comparison with other characters in the primary cast, creates a strong comparison between Flora and classic Mother Nature imagery.

More feminine-oriented and expressive shows also tend to have the clearest biocentric environmental messaging within the analytical sample. *Gisele and the Green Team (2010-2011)* and *Rainbow Rangers (2018-present)* are both shows with an all-female cast that address some form of environmental concern in each episode. *Gisele and the Green Team (2010-2011)* directly discusses the damages of environmental problems like deforestation, toxic pollution, and illegal poaching often at the hands of a shady, bitter businessman named Nick Slick. *Rainbow Rangers (2018-present)* also addresses similar environmental problems, but presents them in a more simplified manner for younger audiences. Where *Gisele and the Green Team* directly addresses human contribution to environmental problems and the solutions, *Rainbow Rangers* focuses on working together to help animals that are endangered because of a surrounding environmental issue. The latter example also portrayed a reoccurring use of family dynamics, particularly that of mother and child, to create an emotional connection with the animals that need help. In the *Rainbow Rangers (2018-present)* episode "Tree Hugger," the eponymous Rainbow Rangers are sent to Earth to help a young buck separated from his mother by a fallen tree and further on ends a deforestation operation by another businessman who equated his ability to knock down trees

with dominating the environment. This operation was made known because the Rangers were

called to aid the doe and her fawn as opposed to being called to stop the ongoing deforestation.

Masculine Presentation and Nature-related Conflict

Masculine-oriented presentations made up half of the analytic sample with 26 series of

the overall 52 analyzed. While masculine characters within this sample do not appear to be

entirely against the natural environment, their interaction with nature as well as their motivations

often seem to differ from their feminine counterparts. Series with a male main cast and/or

protagonist were more likely to have themes presented in episodes rather than characters or as

part of the show's ongoing narrative. The environmental message would come about as a result of

a monster-of-the-week type antagonist, whether the antagonist itself was spurred on by

humanity's treatment of nature or was trying to damage the environment themselves. In

superhero-themed shows like *The Super Hero Squad Show* and *O.K.K.O Let's Be Heroes*, modern

environmental concerns appear to be a focal point of the analyzed episode(s) and show the main

cast teaming up to stop environmental degradation. In the case of *The Super Hero Squad Show*

and *Johnny Test*, the villains teamed up with the heroes because environmental disaster impacted

them as well because their goals of world domination would be impossible if there was no world

to dominate. In contrast, several other series would have conflict caused by environmental

degradation but the resolution does not seem to include lasting impacts to eco-conscious

behaviors. In the *Danny Phantom (2004-2007)* episode "Urban Jungle," plans to develops large

areas of the city's forested areas angered a ghost named "Undergrowth" who planned on using

the residents of the city to feed his seedlings in retaliation. While Undergrowth's actions were

triggered by urban development, the episode shifted to focus on the main character's new powers

and the end showed little indication of a change in development plans. Looking back at the

distinction between anthropocentrism and biocentrism, masculine-oriented shows and storylines

like "Urban Jungle" resolves the conflict only to suggest maintaining the status quo and

continuing to use environmental resources for human development as anthropocentrism posits while feminine-oriented shows are more likely to present direct messaging about challenging the status quo surrounding environmental exploitation in favor of more biocentric attitudes.

Within the analytic sample, characters that exhibit stereotypically-masculine characteristics often fall into one of two categories: 1) they hide their fondness for animals and/or nature or 2) they are the ones aggressively attacking nature, often using anthropocentric arguments of dominating nature or prioritizing human development. The latter category seems to occur across the entire analytic sample regardless of gender orientation, while the former appears more common in masculine-oriented shows such as *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles (2012)*. In *TMNT*, the show's version of Raphael is secretly fond of animals like his pet turtle and is embarrassed whenever one of his brothers walks in on him displaying said affection and expresses fury whenever it is discussed. Sokka from *Avatar the Last Airbender (2005-2008)* also presents masculine stereotypes through the use of aggression as his first tactic, only to learn to use other methods later, and seems reluctant whenever initially befriending Aang's animal companions Appa and Momo at the beginning of the series. Despite eventually learning to respect nature, Sokka regularly seems to consider the environment as an obstacle to defeat and is often put in his place soon after. In the episode "The Swamp," Sokka makes fun of Aang's concern about hacking through the swamp's trees and vines, even pretending to ask a branch for permission before slashing through with his machete.

Balanced and Androgynous Presentations and a Gendered Lens in Non-Specific Settings

A portion of the analytic sample were more unclear about the overall gender orientation the series fit best in. The series within this subset were categorized as balanced or androgynous based on whether or not strongly gendered behaviors were identifiable. Seven series in the analytic sample were identified with the "balanced" category. Balanced series presented both

masculine and feminine behavior in similar frequencies within one or more primary cast narratives and made up. For example, the *Avatar* franchise is labeled "Balanced" because there are clear instances of both masculine and feminine behaviors without leaning more one way or the other. The main characters for both series within the Avatar franchise, Aang and Korra, are meant to champion worldly balance and thus display both masculine and feminine attitudes throughout their respective series. Their friend groups also present diverse gender behaviors that accentuate the ongoing narrative of balance. In *Avatar the Last Airbender (2005-2008)*, Aang's closest friends Sokka and Katara both have episodes in the series where they respectively address an environmental concern that impacts a nearby community. In the episode *The Fortuneteller*, Sokka finds out a volcanic eruption is about to happen even though the fortuneteller in the village at the base of the volcano claimed the village would not be destroyed that year. He struggles to get through to the villagers through logic and instead crafts a plan that leads the fortuneteller to announce the volcano's impending eruption, which spurs the village into action to divert the lava flow with the help of Aang and his friends. In Katara's episode *The Painted Lady*, Katara is concerned when the group passes through a river community plagued by toxic pollution from a factory upstream. Since the group cannot reveal their true identities, Katara decides to disguise herself as the community's local deity called the "Painted Lady" in order to heal the sick villagers and eventually clean up their river. Even though the logical path would be to either leave the community or help without the disguise, Katara chose to use a guise seen as a protector to the village to approach the toxic disaster.

Nine series within the analytic sample were identified as androgynous. The series in this category were primarily series within the TV-Y rating bracket. The shows rated as TV-Y were developed to be appropriate for all ages but more specifically for younger audiences around preschool to first-second grade. These were identified as androgynous because the primary cast was not strongly identifiable as feminine or masculine-oriented. Similar to the feminine-oriented

show *Rainbow Rangers (2018-present)*, the environmental tropes within more androgynous series communicated environmental issues more indirectly and prioritized teaching children about the natural environment and the importance of working together in order to accomplish a task. These shows typically also had some form of educational element, however *Fistronaut (2009-2015)* was the only series in the analytic sample that discussed specific environmental issues like algae blooms and oil spills. Two more notable series within this category are *Dora the Explorer (2000-2019)* and *Go! Diego, Go! (2005-2011).* Both shows are related to one another as the latter is a spin-off of *Dora the Explorer* following her cousin Diego. In *Dora the Explorer (2009-2019)*, Dora's best friend is a talking monkey named Boots and they often work together to help solve the troubles of other characters. In the episode "Meet Diego," Dora introduced Diego to Boots and the three must work together to help save a jaguar cub. This cub is named Baby Jaguar and becomes a reoccurring character along with Diego, becoming Diego's equivalent of Boots in his show *Go! Diego, Go! (2005-2011)* where Diego helps out at his family's animal rescue center deep in the jungle. Both shows have educational purposes within each episode: Dora teaches children different Spanish words that them along the way in each episode while Diego teaches children about the different animals he helps rescue, many of which are presently threatened or endangered due to habitat loss and/or human activities.

One pattern in balanced and androgynous series that is more masculine-oriented is the presentation of a male-presenting character as the team leader. This pattern is evident in the *Avatar* franchise, where Aang from the first series is male and his successor Korra shows more masculine behaviors despite being female. These shows also portray the men in the groups as lead tacticians, particularly with Sokka in *The Last Airbender (2005-2008)* and Mako in *Legend of Korra (2012-2014). Steven Universe (2013-2019)* shows this as well through the main character Steven being deferred to as the leader of the Crystal Gems despite being a young boy, the action of which presents internal conflict for the character as he struggles to protect the Earth and make

up for his mother's mistakes while trying to come into his own identity. Shows that are categorized as androgynous show this pattern as well with male-presenting characters acting as the leaders and/or main characters in *The Amazing World of Gumball (2011-2019), PAW Patrol (2013-present), Stanley (2001-2004), The Fairly Oddparents (2001-2017), Kaeloo (2010-present), Fistronaut (2009-2018), Go! Diego, Go! (2005-2011)* and *The Mr. Men Show (2008-2010)*. While these characters rarely show stereotypically-masculine behaviors, they also do not show stereotypically-feminine behaviors unless the situation warrants either behavior. In *The Fairly Oddparents (2001-2017)*, the main character Timmy being male works to the detriment of eco-positive thinking because the episode analyzed, "Finding Emo," presents the environment through the girl Timmy has a crush on. This girl is suggested to be the kindest, sweetest girl in his class because she is characterized by bluebirds following her everywhere. Other shows with male-presenting leaders show this pattern as inconsequential and often leads the gender identity as vague in the case of *The Amazing World of Gumball* and *Kaeloo*.

Reasoning Tactics: Gendering Emotions Towards Nature

The most apparent connection between femininity and the natural environment throughout sample analysis is the use of emotional reasoning to persuade other characters to take on an eco-friendlier mindset. Femininity has often been associated with emotion while masculinity maintains the domain of logic. Logic seems to be more often used to explain how an environmental problem occurs, but does not extend into the dialogue encouraging environmental reparations. Instead, emotional appeals relating to nature's beauty and the well-being of humans and other living creatures appear to be at the forefront of eco-positive dialogue. *PAW Patrol (2013-present), Rainbow Rangers (2018-present),* and *Gisele and the Green Team (2010-2011)* display strong examples of this distinction, as the main characters receive logical explanations about the causes of the environmental problem they are sent to resolve, but used more emotionally-charged dialogue when discussing the impact out in the field.

TV series within the youngest demographic ranges also use compassion and cooperation-based dialogue to address environmental conflict and resolution. Episodes of *PAW Patrol (2013-present)* that involve environmental themes like helping baby sea turtles or saving a walrus trapped in an old fishing net promote teamwork through delegating tasks to different characters to resolve the problem. In the episode "Pups Save the Sea Turtles," the humans and the eponymous Paw Patrol have to find a way to guide a clutch of newly-hatched sea turtles reach the ocean when there is a road in the way without touching the sea turtles. Positive affirmation also seemed to be the most common follow-up when an episode's conclusion included intent to continue environmentally-beneficial behaviors like recycling or limiting energy waste. In *Kaeloo (2010-present)* and *Little Princess (2006-present)*, the main focus of analytically-relevant episodes discussed recycling and how to separated different recyclables and, in the episode "Let's Play Ecologist" in *Kaeloo (2010-present)*, how to avoid using non-recycling products like single-use plastics in the first place. "Let's Play Ecologist" also saw the main character, Kaeloo, giving their friends several reasons to why people should care about properly recycling and doing other eco-friendly things like reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The reasons range from the threat of running out of natural resources to the effect of climate change on environmental health. Kaeloo's friends respond in different ways, Stumpy beings hyperventilating while Mr. Cat suggests hunting down the offenders, but Kaeloo maintains that the best thing they can do is act locally with actions like recycling, composting, and shopping organically.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Discussion

This study analyzed 52 animated children's shows to explore common patterns observed between gender presentation and environmental themes. The purpose of this study was to explore the gendered messaging present in natural environmental-themed children's media and how this discourse promoted dominant gender norms and stereotypes. Each series presented feminine patterns for advocating pro-environmental behaviors while masculine behaviors often promoted anthropocentric behaviors and maintained the status quo to the detriment of the natural environment. The main feature of these patterns was the use of emotional reasoning based on compassion and cooperation to encourage eco-friendly behaviors like recycling, reducing energy waste, and helping to resolve problems caused by environmental degradation. While logic, which is often presented as masculine-oriented, was used to present environmental themes, logical reasoning was mainly used to explain environmental problems and was unsuccessful if a character attempted to promote environmental action through logic alone.

Environmentally-friendly behaviors were overall presented as more feminine regardless of the apparent gender identity of the relevant character. The female characters representing environmental tropes within a series were often the most feminine of the group, which was often

shown through their roles as the maternal figure in the group as well as being more likely to be soft-spoken and passive in nature. Special abilities often played an important role as well with these characters often displaying magic powers that allowed them to communicate with and/or manipulate either animals or plant life. In shows with male-dominated, both male and female, or non-human casts (such as animals or inanimate objects like toys), ecofriendly characters were more likely to be feminine presenting if not female and continued to address the environment itself with feminine language and behavior patterns. These observations support the notion that society's association of nature with women likely begins during childhood and develops subconsciously like other gender norms. By developing initial environmental attitudes through feminine-oriented behaviors, environmental concerns remain open to discourse later on in life as gender inequality promotes masculine-oriented behaviors that often rely upon resource exploitation or view environmental protections as too costly.

Theory Implications

While theories regarding the social construction of the environment through a gendered lens are limited, ecofeminism was a key theory in developing this study because the main tenants revolve around the feminine perception of the natural environment. Ecofeminism advocates for women to take advantage of their purported connection with nature, particularly in advancing environmental consciousness and activism. The results of this analysis support this theory by presenting the different ways children are taught to associate nature with femininity in popular media. There is a growing body of ecofeminist literature that theorizes how to expand the reaches of ecofeminist ideology and be more gender inclusive. One possible avenue of research might be to investigate how presenting the environment as feminine during childhood impacts environmental attitudes in adulthood.

Another theoretical perspective that was utilized for this study was the association of masculinity and femininity with anthropocentrism and biocentrism respectively. Research on this association showed that anthropocentrism could be predicted by gender and gendered presentation, meaning that men and people with masculine identities were more likely to hold anthropocentric views of nature. In series episodes with clear environmental antagonists, the antagonizing character was often visually male and worked as a politician, a businessman, or as a worker in some other masculine-oriented field. Biocentrism, on the other hand, was seemingly only associated with femininity. During analysis, both of these patterns were also evident. Characters that acted with an anthropocentric view of the environment, those that saw the environment as a font of resources to be exploited, were almost always visually male and exhibited stronger masculine characteristics such as aggressive behaviors or power-dominated motivations. Biocentric behaviors associated with environmental consciousness presented throughout the analytical sample in both male and female characters with greater focus on feminine expressions of compassion and care for the natural environment.

The decision to use a grounded method approach for this study was based on a need for a theoretical framework focusing on the influence of gender beyond individual identity and expression. While the findings of this study do support the influence of gender socialization on shaping environmental perspectives, gender socialization mainly refers to the process of learning common gender norms as they apply to people rather than other social constructs. When looking back at previous studies, one notable observation with this study's findings is specifically looking at the gender-nature interactions during early childhood development. Martin (1998) and Altun (2020) make observations regarding preschoolers' perceptions of gender norms and environmental attitudes respectively. While Martin (1998) shows that gender norms are learned as early as preschool, the findings in Altun (2020) suggest that the impacts of gender on shaping environmental attitudes occur later on. Within the analytic sample of this study, a majority of the

animated series in the youngest age demographic range, TV-Y, were categorized as androgynous due to a lack of strongly-identifiable feminine or masculine behaviors. This disconnect between gender socialization and environmental construction research suggests that the relationship between gender and other socially constructed issues like environmental perspectives requires its own theoretical framework. A new framework would allow the connection of gender to other sociopolitical perspectives as well as form paths for investigating the impact of a gendered lens later on in life.

Policy Implications

Within the United States, the use of gendered, often feminized, imagery in understanding the natural environment could be one of the reasons why environmental problems like pollution and deforestation have largely been ignored for the sake of a stronger economy, particularly in the eyes of political conservatives (Hoffarth and Hodson 2016). A recent example of this is the United States' decision to not send the Kyoto Protocol to the Senate for ratification, an international treaty aimed at reducing carbon emissions, due to the economic risk of entering the agreement while competitors like China and India were exempt from emission reductions because they were considered developing nations (Babiker, Reilly, and Jacoby 2000; Hovi, Sprinz, and Bang 2012). The decision to not ratify of the Kyoto Protocol was unanimous amongst U.S. legislators because the nation's elevated status in the world economy was prioritized over the estimated costs of reducing greenhouse gas emissions under the treaty.

The results of this study can be used to investigate how gender may indirectly impact the way sociopolitical issues such as the environment and gender inequality are managed and prioritized during the policy-making process. While there is evidence like the Kyoto Protocol suggesting a divide between feminine and masculine-oriented issues at the governmental level, there is little in the way of proving that gender motivates the gap because the connection is likely subliminal.

While categorizing socially-constructed issues as feminine or masculine is not inherently wrong, we may need to further investigate how socialization may continue gender inequality through issues rather than individuals and possibly reorient public perception towards addressing feminine-oriented topics at the same level as masculine-oriented ones.

Research Limitations

This study had several limitations associated with the parameters of the sample population and the analysis itself. By focusing on animated television series, there is an analytical gap regarding how other media forms such as films or live-action could have contributed to the patterns observed during analysis. The use of rhetorical tropes through a public database limited the types of animated series relevant to this study as education-based programming was largely absent from each trope category. While the database is closely monitored by a development team, the nature of rhetorical tropes makes it likely that there are more children's programs with human-nature relationships that have not been entered into the system.

The timeframe was another limiting factor in this study as there were many television series that contained relevant themes, but aired prior to 2000. One notable series that was not analyzed in this study is *Captain Planet and the Planeteers*, which is well-known for its environmentalist narrative. Further research could be done to include older series and observe how gendered representation of the environment has developed over multiple decades and the possible effects of these developments.

This study also has a limited scope on gender norms and stereotypes because my analysis focused on Western animation and gender perspectives more common to Western Europe and North America. The focus on Westernized gender perspectives is based on the origin of the TV series that were analyzed as well personal familiarity with the Western gender norms. These gender norms would likely not hold up in children's programmed made outside of Western

Europe and North America and other cultural perspectives would likely result in different observations of this study's sample population. Further research focusing on other cultural regions would be useful in understanding how gender impacts environmental attitudes and whether or not the impacts of constructing the environment through a gendered lens is as great in other regions of the world as it seems to be in Western nations.

Conclusion

Views of the natural environment as inherently feminine have been apparent since early human civilizations like the Ancient Greeks as nature deities were often portrayed as women. Ever since, writings about nature have often used terms commonly associated with women such as "virgin," "caregiver," and the image of "Mother Nature." While the language is not inherently problematic, social scientists have suggested that sociopolitical topics associated with the feminine sphere are considered secondary to masculine-oriented issues such as the economy (Alston 2014; Caine and Sluga 2002; Mills 2002). As more scholars acknowledge the problems associated with applying gender binaries to individuals, I found it concerning that the gendered lens applied to other social constructs like the environment was not being addressed as well. In similar fashion, more theories exist discussing the association of women and nature as a fact of life rather than rooting out the source of this perspective. Characterizing the natural environment with feminine images and language is not an inherently negative thing, however the consequences of femininity in societies driven by economic ventures creates a stalemate in addressing environmental problems created by human activities.

The use of television media as another socialization tool during childhood is a more recent field of research. Even as activists push for more inclusivity in character representation and development, little attention has been given to how gender impacts other forms of messaging, especially in children's media. Future research should be conducted on how gender plays a role in

constructing other social issues as well as how messaging within television media might continue the trend of prioritizing masculine-oriented issues over feminine-oriented ones. Looking at the origins of this divide may prove to open more avenues for promoting gender equality and advocate for other prominent social issues like anthropogenic climate change.

This research project demonstrates a small snapshot of how gender can shape the way humans socially construct their environmental perspectives during childhood socialization. The difference in gender norms across the world raises the question of how gender impacts environmental attitudes in other cultures and whether or not there are similarities to Western perspectives. Continuing this line of research, I would like to see how activism in younger generations develops and whether or not the gender patterns observed through mediums like children's programming has an effect on their perception of the environment. The relevance of the gendered lens of nature expands beyond environmental sociology into areas including gender studies, education, political science, and economics. In order to increase environmental awareness, we must prioritize how environmental attitudes are shaped from childhood to adulthood through other social perspectives such as gender.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Television Series Included in Analytic Sample

Series Title	Year	TV Rating
Avatar The Last Airbender	2005-2008	TV-Y7
Avatar: Legend of Korra	2012-2014	TV-PG
Ben 10	2005-2008	TV-Y7-FV
Dan Vs.	2011-2013	TV-PG
Danny Phantom	2004-2007	TV-Y7-FV
DC Super Hero Girls	2019-present	TV-PG
Doc McStuffins	2012-2020	TV-Y
Dora the Explorer	2000-2019	TV-Y
Fishtronaut	2009-2018	TV-Y
Gisele and the Green Team	2010-present	TV-Y7
Go! Diego! Go!	2005-2011	TV-Y
Grojband	2013-2015	TV-PG
Harvey Beaks	2015-2017	TV-Y7
HTTYD - Dragons: Riders of Berk	2012-2018	TV-Y7
Jimmy Two-Shoes	2009-2012	TV-Y7
Johnny Test	2005-2014	TV-Y7
Justice League	2001-2004	TV-PG
Kaeloo	2010-present	NR
Little Princess	2006-present	TV-Y7
Littlest Pet Shop (2012)	2012-2016	TV-Y
Making Fiends	2008	TV-Y7
Martha Speaks	2008-2014	TV-Y
My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic	2010-2019	TV-Y
O.k.k.o Let's Be Heroes	2013-2019	TV-Y7-FV
PAW Patrol	2013-present	TV-Y
Rainbow Rangers	2018-present	TV-Y
Ready Jet Go	2016-2019	TV-Y
Samurai Jack	2001-2017	TV-14
She-Ra and the Princesses of Power	2018--2020	TV-Y7-FV
Stanley	2001-2004	TV-Y
Star Wars: Rebels	2014-2018	TV-Y7-FV
Star Wars: The Clone Wars	2008-2020	TV-PG

Series Title (cont.)	Year	TV Rating
Steven Universe	2013-2019	TV-PG
Sushi Pack	2007-present	NR
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles (2012)	2012-2017	TV-Y7-FV
The Amazing World of Gumball	2011-2019	TV-Y7-FV
The Cramp Twins	2001-2006	TV-Y7
The Fairly OddParents	2001-2017	TV-Y7
The Future is Wild	2007-2008	NR
The Grim Adventures of Billy & Mandy	2000-2007	TV-Y7-FV
The Legend of Tarzan	2001-2003	TV-Y
The Loud House	2016-present	TV-Y7
The Mr. Men Show	2008-2010	TV-Y
The Owl House	2020-present	TV-Y7-FV
The Super Hero Squad Show	2009-2011	TV-Y7
Thunderbirds Are Go	2015-2020	TV-G
Thundercats (2011)	2011-2012	TV-PG
Total Drama	2007-2014	TV-PG
Transformers Animated	2007-2009	TV-Y7
Transformers Rescue Bots	2012-2016	TV-Y7
Transformers: Prime	2010-2013	TV-Y7
Wakfu	2008-present	TV-Y7-FV
Winx Club	2004-2009; 2011-2019	TV-Y7

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