

How are the oppression of women and the environment related? I am very passionate about attaining justice for all beings and Planet Earth as a whole. In looking closely, the oppression of women and nature intersect on a global scale. Both women and our planet experience their struggles as a result of a patriarchal mind-set and the capitalist system. “Ecofeminism” is a term for the movement, uniting the efforts to defend the rights of nature with those advocating for gender equality. This paradigm asserts that women and nature are damaged by the same patriarchal attitudes and philosophies. Not only do global industries exploit the most vulnerable workers, they pollute the biosphere by using cheap nonrenewable resources, therefore threatening the health of the planet for greater profit. By ensuring safe working and living conditions for all people, particularly the vulnerable, we can safeguard nature and provide an improved welfare for all. Why, we must ask, is this so hard to do? Why is business often so immoral and uncaring about women and our planet?

I want this collage to trigger the viewer’s emotion—to reflect on the violent dominance of the systems that hurt people and nature. Collage and mixed media materials suggest the many layers of patriarchal and capitalistic values that create injustice. I used maps, ripped images of women, illustration, paint, and string to create an image of our collective suffering and its intersecting themes. Much like ecology, every part of the collage is necessary to understand the rest.

If we stand together to support each other, particularly those who suffer the most, we can begin to heal the planet as a whole. Working towards ending global warming, pollution, and deforestation will benefit all of us and all life on our precious planet.

Jade

As patriarchal (violent, male dominated) industries grow, the existence of a woman's value shrinks and nature crumbles. Western society has created a lense that we are pressed up against and forced to look through. Our bodies and minds seem less perfect because we don't meet an unrealistic standard. Our values are capitalistically based and all the more harmful to the environment and each other. Anyone different from the ancient societal standard breathes in the toxic chemicals of violent domination. We are forced into a box when we are young. Half the box is baby blue and the other is peachy pink. The blue promises a higher chance at positions of authority while the pink whispers that it could be worse and to keep a straight back.

I grew up a witness to altered truths of the female body and of the true state of the environment. Through media I learned how I should look, act, and speak. Narcissistic, profit driven companies sold me on the idea that I needed to be better. What they didn't note on their terms of agreement was that it would take me years to regain confidence in who I was naturally. They didn't care to warn of the side effects that gnaw away at your self-esteem and kill planet earth. I swallowed artificial advertisements without question into my naive and vulnerable mind. Industrious chemicals dehydrated the beautiful plants and beings that once thrived in my imagination.

As an intuitive and sensitive person, I have always been aware of the feelings of those around me and observant of my environment. I am naturally driven to defend those without a voice, as I have such a voice, and I am privileged in more ways than one. I speak for creatures weaker than humans who can't fight back: Those who are killed for fun or for profit. I will never stop fighting for innocent beings that don't deserve to die. No one deserves such a fate. I am also an activist for the rights of all humans of all races, genders, sexualities, and religions. I believe that all humans should have a chance for an education and deserve to be treated with equal respect. Without challenging the oppressive system that plagues people, animals, and the earth, I don't think my advantages in this society would have any important purpose.

I chose to research ecofeminism for my project specifically because of where I stand in society and how I relate to its concepts. I am a young woman who doesn't identify with the heteronormative, capitalist, and patriarchal society I live in. I don't approve or relate to the pro-deforestation, water wasting companies that dominate the economy and hurt human beings and animals solely for their company's profit.

My project started when I began to look at the different kinds of feminism for my notes. When I hadn't found anything that triggered artistic ideas, my teacher suggested looking into intersectionality. Suddenly, this word began to stand out in all of my research. Connections popped up where I had never seen them before and things fell into place. Intersectionality is the concept that all oppressed groups are connected because the same forces oppress them. This relates to the idea that all life is connected and everything has direct influence on everything else. I chose to focus on one area of intersectionality and came upon ecofeminism- something that expresses and explains many of my social, political, and spiritual viewpoints.

We are all connected by what we struggle with or what we believe in. Unfortunately, we are all connected through the fact that we all suffer from the side effects of patriarchal and capitalist values. Dominating and authoritative groups of people fail to understand what outside groups need. These dominant groups also can't manage to be conscientious of who and what they are damaging. Industries make money off of lying to women about a so-called "attainable image" and using up non-renewable resources. What hurts women is additionally harmful to the environment. Women face several more challenges than men as they are more likely to get hurt during natural disasters, get paid less for the same work, and are labeled as the weaker and more

vulnerable gender. The same poisonous companies that dehumanize and objectify women wound nature. Ecofeminism and intersectionality explain this connection. The systematic oppression of women and the environment are inseparable as they are results of the same agenda.

### **Intersectionality and What is Ecofeminism?**

Ecofeminism developed when people understood that acknowledging the environment as a feminist issue helped to explain the oppression of women and other oppressed groups. “Racism, classism, ableism, ageism, heterosexism, anti-semitism, and colonialism are feminist issues because understanding them helps to understand the subordination of women.”(Karen J. Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy: A Western Perspective on What It Is and Why It Matters*.) All of the oppressive groups are examples of each other. To understand what affects everyone is to understand a mutual state of suffering. Intersectionality, the study of how mutual systems of oppression are merged and go unattached when being addressed, helps to explain the setup of ecofeminism. Everything is connected in one form or another when it comes to oppression and global domination.

### **How are the oppressions of women and nature intersected?**

The oppression of the environment and of minorities go hand in hand. Both are a result of a patriarchal mindset (accepting unequal living conditions as natural and acceptable) and capitalism. This is nothing new; in fact, it’s hard to find a time when we weren’t affected by these patriarchal ways of thinking. The destruction of the environment and human rights are intersected because movements that work for them challenge the same harmful systems. Intersectionality, or the inseparable connection between oppressed beings or things, is what Ecofeminism is based on. Sara Alcid, BA in Political Science and Gender Studies, from Everyday Feminism says that, “Examining environmental issues with a feminist lense enables us to see the intersection of gender, socio-economics, and the environment.” Ecofeminism argues that the environment is a feminist issue just as much as any oppressed people because the destruction of nature is an outcome of the same injurious systems. Interconnection is present through common suffering. Capitalism, “a way of organizing an economy so that the things that are used to make and transport products (such as land, oil, factories, ships, etc.) are owned by individual people and companies rather than by the government,”(Merriam Webster), and globalization, “a process of interaction and integration among the people, companies, and governments of different nations, a process driven by international trade and investment and aided by information technology,”(The Levin Institute) both cause terrible harm to women and nature.

The patriarchal mindset tells us that women belong at home practicing “weaker” and undervalued jobs. Women who work at home don’t achieve the same social status as men and therefore carry limited freedom and shame with them for not making money for their household. Today there are more women in the workplace, except they don’t earn the same amount of money as men for the same positions. Women are paid \$0.78 cents for every man’s \$1.00 (Catalyst Incorporation.) Women of color get paid even less than white women. Denise Comanne, an active feminist who fought against capitalism, racism, and patriarchy said, “In other words, when the capitalists need extra labor, they call upon women whom they pay less than men, which has the side-effect of dragging down wages generally. This means that the State is forced to provide services to facilitate women’s jobs or allow them to offload some of their responsibilities. Then when they no longer require women’s labor, they send them home, back to

their “proper place” in patriarchal terms.”” This means that capitalists see women as a fallback plan if there aren’t men for the positions. Women and children aren’t seen as human beings in these industries. They are prone to working in unsafe environments with lower wages. An extreme example of these companies would be when in 2013, the eight-story Rana Plaza factory building (a clothes factory) in Bangladesh collapsed and killed hundreds of people, most of whom were identified as “female garment workers.” The owner of the company had known of the dangerous, unstable state of the building, but he threatened to not pay the workers for the next month if they didn’t show up for work the next day. The owner, Mohammad Sohel Rana, has been protested against and protesters have made it clear that they see the death penalty suitable for what he has done (BBC News.) This sort of case could be more common in Bangladesh with the unsafe conditions of other garment factories and in other third world countries. Women, children, and other low paid workers struggle to survive healthily and safely because massive industries are unwilling to care about their blind actions. These industries put profit before the well being of people, animals, and nature.

Women are directly connected to nature in the sense that they experience many more negative impacts from natural disasters. 14% more women die when a natural disaster occurs than men do. Women in many countries are also uneducated on what to do in the case of a natural disaster. They don’t get to participate in safety planning and therefore cannot prepare themselves. This forces them to rely on their male partners. Women and children will wait in their homes for the husband or father to come home and tell them to evacuate, and end up dying because they can’t handle the situation on their own. During disasters in Nepal or South Asia, women can go without sanitary items for long periods, which result in them developing dangerous diseases. These diseases are acquired through not drying menstruation rags and using them over and over again. Sexual violence rates also rocket during natural disasters. Women who have nowhere safe to stay are more vulnerable to being sexually assaulted. A practice in Nepal, *Chaupadi*, is an act where women isolate themselves during their menstruation. This pushes them into unsafe territories that are a direct result of natural disaster. Additionally, there have been cases where human trafficking groups will pose as aid organizations and kidnap women and girls during natural disasters (BEENISH AHMED, from Think Progress Organization.) In terms of how these natural disasters are influenced by global warming, NASA says, “Possible—outcomes of an increase in global temperatures include increased risk of drought and increased intensity of storms, including tropical cyclones with higher wind speeds, a wetter Asian monsoon, and, possibly, more intense mid-latitude storms.” This means that there could be an increase in the death of women from natural disasters if they become more extreme and dangerous from global warming. The harmful ways of capitalism and patriarchy put the condition of the environment and the safety of women in danger. Ecofeminism is something to assist us in working against these unhealthy ways of destruction.

Ecofeminism is considered as somewhat spiritual because it is strongly influenced by Goddess spirituality. Goddess spirituality, the worship of Mother Nature (Goddess), often labeled as witchcraft, has influenced some different branches of ecofeminism. The Goddess symbol is recurrent from preliterate prehistory up to today’s history. There are figurines, paintings, and carvings of the vulva that have been discovered and understood as from coming from the upper Paleolithic era (300,000-7000 B.C.E.). These were found most commonly in Europe, the Middle East, and Africa.



(Venus figurines of the Paleolithic Era in Europe)

Female objects dominate male ones from the Paleolithic era. Scientists think that this is because perhaps cave people did not make the connection between sex and childbirth. They could have just assumed that women magically produced life on their own. The Goddess seems to have been “born of herself, the foundation of all being, the source of life, death, and regeneration.” (*Goddess: Myths of the Female Divine*. Leeming, Page, 1994.) Connections between places of worship and the female body are found in the Late Neolithic temple of Ggantija (the giant) in Malta.



Places of worship similar to this are still found today according to David Leeming and Jake Page, “Much as the sacred Yoni, or vulva, of the Hindu Goddess guards the entrance to many Hindu temples today.” As far back in history as you can look, women have constantly been associated with nature or “Mother Earth.” Judith Plant says that, “A ‘virgin’ forest is one awaiting exploitation, as yet untouched by man.” This parallel to the socially constructed hatred for women behind the values that surround virginity is a crucial one to understanding the logical connection between women and nature. Comparatively recent history, the traditional role of women is to care for home life whilst men are assigned the role of going out and finding ways to make money for the home life. This custom of female oppression emerged from what was once the worship and appreciation of females. Women were seen as magical and important and so was nature. What was once was treasured is now throw aside and abused. Along with spreading hatred of women grew the domination of nature that has lead to its destruction.

The subjugation of women and demolishment of nature are intersected. Human welfare is connected to environment. How do we work to overcome such a harmful and globally dominating way of life? I propose that we start by redesigning the societal acceptance of inequality. As Denise Comanne said, “Relationships based on domination are often accompanied by discourse that represents social inequalities as natural.” By starting out with fixing the intense issue of inequality and injustice, we will become more able to fight for the environment. How can we reverse the state of our planet without a global effort? The answer is, we can’t. We won’t be able

to end global warming or stop deforestation without the equal help of all human beings. By working towards improving the environment, we will improve the lives of marginalized peoples. We need to save each other to save the Planet Earth and vice-versa.

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