

Author copy

Marion Pajumets and Jeff Hearn

'Doing gender by not doing gender: Men eco-communards' masculine identity talk within a "gender-neutral" worldview', in P. M. Pule and M. Hultman (eds.) *Men, Masculinities and Earth: Exploring ecological masculinities*, Palgrave Macmillan, Houndmills, 2020.

Doing Gender by Not Doing Gender in Eco-communities: Masculine Identity Talk within a “Gender-Neutral” Worldview

Marion Pajumets and Jeff Hearn

Abstract

Is ecological sensitivity sufficient for revolutionising gender relations? Are eco-communities sites from where new masculinities can arise that are truly caring towards the nature as well as women, other men and further genders? Could eco-villages be hatcheries of “ecological masculinity”? We present Estonian men eco-communards’ “gender-neutral holistic worldview” comprising discourses of “ecology”, “sustainable economy”, “re-establishing community”, and “spirituality” as an exemplary case for studying doing gender by not doing gender deliberately or explicitly. Analysis of open-ended interviews with eco-communard men, and the articles they published in Estonian media identifies the presence of, and negotiations between, varied masculine subject positions in talking of their green worldview. Thus, gender may be implicitly constructed as an undercurrent of “other” pursuits that are presented as having little or nothing to do with gender power relations. Practices, interactions and identities are rarely gender-neutral, despite some perceptions and appearances to the contrary. This approach examining the material-discursive field of contingent, multiple masculinity/ies within a “gender-neutral” material-discursive field also has further relevance for discerning the implicit maintenance of social divisions and power relations in other contexts.

Keywords

“Non-gendered gendering”; eco-communities; positioning in discourse; post-socialism; neo-liberalism

Biographies

Marion Pajumets defended a PhD in Sociology at the University of Tallinn in 2012. Her thesis ‘Post-Socialist Masculinities, Identity Work, and Social Change: An Analysis of Discursive (Re)constructions of Gender Identity in Novel Social Situations’ combined two disciplines - critical studies of men and masculinities, and the sociology of migration. Her postdoctoral research, which she carried out at the Centre for Feminist Social Studies, Örebro University, in 2014-2015, tackled the challenges of women researchers’ mobility within Europe. Her other fields of research include sociology of family and qualitative research methods in social sciences.

Jeff Hearn is Senior Professor, Gender Studies, Örebro University, Sweden; Professor of Sociology, University of Huddersfield, UK; Professor Emeritus, Hanken School of Economics, Finland; Professor Extraordinarius, University of South Africa; Fellow of Academy of Social Sciences (UK); and honorary doctor, Social Sciences, Lund University, Sweden. His most recent books include: *Men of the World: Genders, Globalizations, Transnational Times*, 2015, Sage; *Men’s Stories for a Change*, co-author, 2016, Common Ground; *Revenge Pornography*, with Matthew Hall, 2017; *Engaging Youth in Activist Research and Pedagogical Praxis: Transnational Perspectives on Gender, Sex, and Race*, co-ed., 2018; *Unsustainable Institutions of Men: Transnational Dispersed Centres, Gender Power, Contradictions*, co-ed., 2019, all three

Routledge; and *Age at Work: Ambiguous Boundaries of Organizations, Organizing and Ageing*, with Wendy Parkin, Sage, 2020.

Introduction

Class, gendered and further relations of power and inequality may be maintained and reinforced by denials, minimisations, and even, paradoxically, inversions. In some cases, this may involve specific invocations of notions of classlessness or class-neutrality, genderlessness or gender-neutrality, or similar non-recognition of inequalities. In other cases, class or gender or further inequalities are so taken-for-granted that they do not warrant mention at all or are treated as non-negotiable “natural(ised)” facts of life. Such mystifications are widespread in everyday life, and indeed also in academic and political analysis.

In this chapter, we pursue these issues in relation to masculine identity constructions of Estonian men who are members of eco-communities. Specifically, we examine how men’s gender identity is implicitly constructed as an undercurrent of supposedly wider political pursuits perceived or presented as having little or nothing to do with gender power relations. We focus on eco-communard men’s¹ “holistic worldview” material discourse, which comprises four sub-discourses – “ecology”, “economy”, “community” and “spirituality”, which in turn correspond to Global Ecovillage Network’s (2019) four dimensions of sustainability. None of those sub-discourses appear to have been deliberately or explicitly gendered. However, it seems that these men’s “gender-neutral” holistic worldview can harbour positionings that reconstruct masculine identity in sometimes surprising, contradictory and gendered ways.

We have two main aims in this chapter. First, we examine the social processes of doing gender through *not* doing gender explicitly and deliberately. We examine how members of an “unmarked” social category reproduce themselves, by *not* explicitly speaking of their social positioning. Such social processes of “non-gendered gendering” tend to be perpetuated especially by those located within social categories that are relatively powerful or relatively valued in specific social situations and societies. One privilege of the privileged is not to see privilege, just as those in dominant positions tend to know less about subordinates than subordinates know of

¹ In using the term, eco-communard, we refer to interviewees who identified as members of eco-communities. We prefer the terms eco-commune / eco-communard to ecovillage/eco-villager since some of the interviewees were still in the process of establishing an eco-village; however, they regularly met with a group of people with whom they felt they belonged in the same eco-community. While ‘a community’ can be more imagined than material, ‘a village’ ought to be a material place. Moreover, a village refers to rural setting, while some interviewees preferred to establish their communities in an urban environment.

them. In such ways supposed “gender-neutrality” can easily become a dominant norm, obscuring gender divisions, with gender inequality characteristically assumed as lying elsewhere, thus reproducing privilege. The various gendered practices, interactions and identities that are often presented and perceived as gender-neutral may facilitate differences in authority, time and resources at the disposal of men and women, effectively perpetuating patriarchal relations. In such social practices men and masculinities easily become an “absent presence” with men’s identities routinely seen as non-gendered and suggesting complex intersections of the marked and unmarked (Hearn, 1998).

Second, we investigate this “non-gendered gendering” in a specific site that might appear as characterised by progressive political radicalism and even ideals of egalitarianism, namely, eco-communities. It has been long recognised that what may appear or be represented as progressive political movements, such as Marxist, national liberationist, socialist or communist movements, can harbour rather conservative, gender inequitable, hierarchical, patriarchal or sexist ideologies and practices, especially on the part of some men (Hearn, 1987; Cockburn, 1988; Vihma, 2008). For some, the significance of marked and unmarked identities might seem rather well-trodden territory not worthy of re-examining; however, this issue remains of vital political significance, especially in contexts of political and economic transition. Indeed, contemporary environmental movements, that often promote egalitarianism in their public rhetoric, may in fact reproduce the “business as usual”, in terms of gender order as well as in terms of exploiting nature. That is the case with ecological modernisation politics which argues, often through the mouths of leading businessmen and mainstream men politicians such as Arnold Schwarzenegger, that environmental problems should be addressed by technological innovations and economic growth and not by changing lifestyles and consuming less. Technological solutions such as electric cars, geoengineering, and nuclear power are continuously championed by actors performing what arguably can be understood as “ecomodern masculinities” (Hultman, 2013).²

Moreover, cross-national research on environmentalism has revealed some overall gender differences, with women overall tending to greater environmental concern and environmentally-

² Arnold Schwarzenegger continues to brand himself as an environmental hero in October 2019 by proposing to lend the climate activists Greta Thunberg his electric-powered Hummer, for a tour in the Americas that would culminate with her participation at the 2019 United Nations Climate Change Conference. eventually, since that car was deemed too impractical, he instead provided her with a Tesla Model 3 (Bryant, 2019).

oriented behavioural change (Davidson & Freudenburg, 1996; Zelezny, Chua, & Aldrich, 2000; Rätty & Carlsson-Kanyama, 2010; Hawkins & Ojeda, 2011). Detailed analysis of men's talk on the environment illustrates such tendencies (Dahl, 2011). Brough, Wilkie, Ma, Isaac & Gal (2016) explain men's resistance to environmentally-friendly products and behaviours with a stereotype held by both men and women that green consumers are more feminine and argue that this green-feminine stereotype may motivate men to avoid green behaviours in order to preserve a strongly masculine image.

There has long been extensive scholarly and political discussion on the links between men, masculinities, the environment and its degradation, and environmentalism (see Easlea, 1983; Strange, 1983; Hearn, 2015; Enarson & Pease, 2016; Balkmar & Hearn, 2019). Connell (1990, 1995, Chapter 5; Ouzgane & Coleman, 1998) has specifically suggested that men's involvement in environmentalism may be progressive for gender equality and feminist politics. More recently, Hultman and Pulé (2018, p. 8) have argued that unfettered Western (what they refer to as "industrial/ breadwinner") and reformist (referred to as "ecomodern") masculinities have proved inadequate responses to the growing global social and environmental challenges, since both have coveted corporate capitalism while amplifying social and environmental decay. They, however, remain hopeful, and offer a third response, "ecological masculinity", that provides some proactive pathways towards relational, more caring masculinities. For all these reasons, men eco-communards are an interesting group to study.

Having said that, we add three caveats on men's possible gender progressivism in eco-communities. First, much previous research on gender relations in communes, though not necessarily *eco*-communes, has suggested that such communities do not necessarily live up to their egalitarian ideals, but often manifest more or less patriarchal attitudes and unequal treatment of men and women (Kanter, 1972; Minturn, 1984; Kleineman, 1996). Indeed 'the cultural history of the environmental movement limits ... transformation of masculinity even as it makes it possible' (Connell, 1995, p. 142). Second, environmental movements vary much in terms of their political ideologies, with tendencies ranging from anarchist and broadly socialist to deeply conservative, from alliances with indigenous communities to faith in advanced technology, amongst other positions. Third, these problematics need to be placed very much within their post-socialist context, including moves towards retraditionalised, refamilialised notions of nationhood, and inequitable gender relations. In some cases, "returning" to traditional,

patriarchal religious and spiritual ideologies has reinforced “traditional” gender ideals and practices (Novikova & Kambourov, 2003; Novikova, Pringle, Hearn, Müller, Oleksy, Chernova, ... Ventimiglia, 2005), constituting new, specifically post-socialist, patriarchal forms. This context is rather contradictory: some eco-communards may distance themselves from retraditionalisation, while others may embrace aspects of contemporary spirituality, even though Estonia is one of the least religious European countries (Hankewitz, 2018).

The Estonian Context

Before regaining independence in 1991, Estonia had been part of the Soviet Union for 50 years. Men and women were formally declared equal in the Soviet regime; typically, women worked full-time for pay, however, remaining rare among political-economic elites. Gender equality was largely public rhetoric, rather than lived reality (Occhipinti, 1996; Ferge, 1997).

At the beginning of 1990s, newly independent Estonia was immersed in radical liberal economic restructuring. Rapid “westernisations” implied major losses of jobs and workplaces, for example, *kolkhoz* type of collective farms and huge city factories, with subsequent exclusion of middle-aged men and former skilled workers, as in other post-socialist Baltic states (Novikova, 2008; Tereškinas, 2009). At the same time, some other men gained from the dramatic decline of employment protection, low minimum wages, privatisation, and semi-legal businesses. A stratum of businessmen emerged that included former members of the Soviet elite who utilised their information and networks to privatise industrial enterprises and real estate. In addition, a generation of younger ambitious Estonian men, and some capitalist men migrating from the West, took advantage of the cheap labour costs and unregulated entrepreneurial environment to start businesses (Pilvre, 2013).

The transition from socialism to capitalism and state reconstruction brought many changes in the gender order in post-socialist societies, including cultural masculinisation with the glorification of success, strength, and harsh competition and marginalisation of care and emotional spheres. Neoliberal ideologies and U.S. corporate culture have spread as sites for reconstructing masculine identity (Connell, 2005/2007; Pilvre, 2013). In this vein, Pilvre (2011) argued that hegemonic masculine identity in Estonia after regaining its independence from the Soviet Union became a hybrid of corporate and nationalist masculinities.

As in most former socialist countries at the beginning of 1990s, a strengthening of traditional gender hierarchies and neotraditionalism could be observed in Estonia (Narusk & Kandolin, 1997). Along with women's loss of state sector jobs, public opinion and leading political forces favoured women staying at home, sometimes referencing women in the idealised pre-Soviet 1930s (Piltre, 2013). Despite the fact that most Estonian women continue to work full time there is a rather clear gender segregation of the labour market, and the gender pay gap remains one of the largest among European Union member states (Eurostat, 2016). Yet, feminist (and profeminist) movements are almost non-existent. The Soviet version of gender equality with women's double shift and token women in top positions had most probably discredited gender equality ideals (Occhipinti, 1996; Ferge, 1997). Most people were more likely to dream of wealth and conspicuous consumption, rather than gender-equality.

While gender was considered a rather marginal topic in Estonia in the last decades, environmentalism has been a major public issue. Indeed, protecting the local environment from the Soviet administration's plan to establish phosphorite pits in Eastern Estonia triggered spontaneous mass revolts in 1987-1988 that ultimately led to leaving the Soviet Union. The initially apolitical green movement soon developed into a social protest movement and was a significant stimulus to political mobilisation and restitution of the Republic of Estonia in 1991. Indeed, an institutionalised green movement was a first alternative to the communist party (Vihma, 2011, pp. 74-78). At the beginning of 1990s, however, the more overtly political strand and the NGO strand working to preserve the natural environment diverged. Green philosophy subsequently expanded and entered the mainstream. Commodities with the prefix "eco" are popular with consumers, with choice between regular or green electricity, for example. More radically, some groups aspired to live in eco-villages (Allaste, 2011, 2013) and develop new communities, informed by the experiences, suggestions and discourses of the Global Ecovillage Network.

The data collection and analysis were conducted during the period 2008-2015, and since then, various relevant changes have occurred in Estonian society. Importantly, green movement ideology and politics are still very popular, even mushrooming, with, in addition to the traditional green party, a newly formed party, Elurikkuse erakond) emanating from the eco-community movement. Its prime ministerial candidate is an ecology professor, and it includes some eco-communards interviewed for this study. Moreover, for the last years, there is a new

powerful popular movement focusing on preserving Estonian forests and their biodiversity. Indeed, forests have been the most hotly contested topic in the Estonian media, alongside controversies about migration.

Masculine subject positioning in discourse

This research is based on semi-structured, open-ended interviews with ten men who were members of Estonian eco-communities, and 20 newspaper articles they had published in Estonian media on eco-communities and ecological issues more broadly. All participants were university educated; most were in their thirties; all considered themselves to live in stable relationships with women partners; and four had young children. “Snowballing” helped to single out next community members that needed to be interviewed; they were described by several of their companions interviewed earlier as important in the movement. Interviews lasted one to two and a half hours, they were recorded and fully transcribed. Interviews took place in offices, cafés or eco-villages themselves, according to the respondent’s preference. All were conducted by the first author. All names are pseudonyms and in some cases details have been modified. Five of the interviewees, including some of the leading eco-community spokespersons, belonged to groups which did not yet have a fixed location (a village) when they were interviewed. Importantly, their groups shared a specific worldview under the label “eco-community”, engaged in multiple processes of community-building, and sought a place to settle down. The other five informants were from already established communities.

The interview *pro forma* did not explicitly address the topic of constructing masculinity. It did include questions on divisions of labour between women and men in eco-communities, organisation of childrearing and schooling, and so on. The answers to these were typically brief and somewhat disinterested. The interviewees characteristically assumed gender inequality was a problem elsewhere. They themselves were passionate about explaining their holistic worldview, and its four realms, which they considered truly revolutionary. However, as more and more interviews were conducted it gradually became clearer that their accounts included a persistent, but apparently unintentional, undercurrent of differentiating between “us” and “others”, “strong” and “weak” which were reminiscent of discursive constructions of masculinity.

This study makes use of subject positioning in discourse – a theoretical and analytic lens for studying identity constructions in language use and discourse (Davies & Harré, 1990; Harré

& van Langenhove 1999). The aim of this method is to identify the active modes in which individuals seek to locate themselves and others in discourses during interaction. Importantly, those positionings can either be conscious and reflexive or rather undeliberate. Indeed, often people simply take up the prevailing discourses and the subject positions they entail instead of knowingly transforming them to generate unknown and why not more egalitarian forms of relations. Thus, men's identity talk often, but not always, re-uses masculine subject positionings that are inherited from family, cultural and societal traditions rather than stemming directly from the current situation and its specific and often urgent requirements (Pajumets, 2012; Pajumets & Hearn, 2012).

Doing Masculinity While Talking Ecology

Exploring, subjugating and taming the wilderness to serve human purposes have been integral to "Western civilisation", with Man's (sic.) hierarchy over Nature sometimes legitimised by the divine sanction of Judaeo-Christianity. While the Enlightenment questioned, and at times rejected, the religious mysticism of the previous era it maintained the view that Nature was a source of riches for human exploitation. Its forces were there to be harnessed by modern science in the name of progress (Merchant, 1990). The eco-communard men interviewed patently distanced themselves from this exploitative religious and philosophical western tradition and disapproved of its paternalistic assumptions. Instead of claiming superiority, they spoke of *pursuing an equal relationship with Nature*. They recycled, tried to grow organic food, and built homes using traditional and renewable building materials. Their rejection of a superior position towards Nature represents a shift long sought by ecofeminists, who maintain that subjugation of Nature and oppression of women reflect two sides of the same coin, a single exploitative ethic, on the part of men; this suggests that growing respect towards Nature is likely to lead to the end of patriarchy (ibid.; Warren, 1990).

Participants typically associated living in the countryside with more opportunities to take care of Nature as it takes care of mankind. Several men were former city dwellers who had moved to rural areas a few years before being interviewed. This is diametrically opposed to a more significant trend towards urbanisation in Estonia after the collapse of Soviet Union.⁴ In Estonia the trend is that the younger and more educated and adventurous tend to head towards the capital, Tallinn, or the second largest town, Tartu, where work and resources have

concentrated. Rural life is rarely desired, and rural masculinity rarely celebrated in post-socialist Estonia. On the contrary, wealth, success and masculinity are considered urban phenomena.

Some eco-villagers thus represent a contradictory trend in this general context of urbanisation. Daniel, for example, had a career in a large telecommunications company and an apartment in Tallinn's, Old Town. He replaced this celebrated lifestyle with a new life in the countryside.

From there (a base in the countryside) you can go wherever you want – to Tallinn, to Tartu. (...) But having such a strong base, I don't think you would want to stay in Tallinn for long. You can, of course. If you really have no other opportunities, if you lack any better ideas, then you stay in the city, messing with computers and fiddling with keyboards - simply making money. But that was too easy for me, and that is why I left.

Interestingly, he and other interviewees did not perceive such moves as retrogressive. Instead, they reinterpreted the relationship between rural life, itself often denigrated, and the quality of (human) life as positive. Here, Daniel positioned himself as resourceful due to his rural lifestyle and identified city dwellers as lacking in strength, opportunities, and ideas. He used rural lifestyle as a basis for claiming superiority over the masses heading towards the cities; while this might not seem necessarily gendered, the co-relations of superiority, power, and masculinity in the Estonian cultural context would probably suggest otherwise.

The next excerpt is from an article authored by a former business partner in a fashionable communications company who had moved nearly 300 kilometres away from the capital to lead what he called “a real life”, as opposed to what he termed the “pseudo life” of the urbanised masses. He portrayed people like himself as morally superior and content; to create a contrast he positioned the members of the larger group with urban lifestyle as slaves or drug addicts who are too lethargic and apathetic to manage even their own lives.

The core values seem to be stronger in people who live a rural life. (...) Those living in or who have returned to the country seem to be better equipped for happiness than townspeople. Those who live in the country, tired after their workday, pay a compulsory visit to the TV, then go out to the barn for a moment, look at the stars, and real life continues despite the doomsday prophecies just heard on the media. The weary townspeople, on the other hand, falls asleep in front of the television. He uses the media and the Internet – virtual worlds – and other drugs to escape from real life.

Within the ecology sub-discourse two prominent, yet very different, masculine subject positions intertwine. By positioning themselves as *pursuing an equal relationship with Nature*, participants discursively disconnect their self-worth and masculinity from mastering the natural world – a novel way of gaining positive masculine identity. However, the parallel position of

being the one *living a real life* uses lifestyle to build a hierarchy of “us” and “others”, elite and masses, or a claim to a placing themselves at the top of the gender hierarchy.

Doing Masculinity While Talking Economy

These eco-communards generally strongly disapproved of Western capitalism, with its consumer lifestyles, extended bank loans, and dedication of excessive time to career rather than family, friends and community. Rather typically, a spokesman for Estonian eco-communities lamented in a major daily newspaper that ‘the two decades of regained independence have been a race for success and money, which has deprived our people and State of inner peace’. Economic achievement – a central component of dominant post-socialist masculinity – is often explicitly criticised by the communards. They often reject men’s “toys”, such as the expensive cars and sophisticated technical devices, fetishised in neoliberal Estonia (whilst promoting advanced technology windmills, solar panels and the like). Hence, participants position themselves as *no longer serving mammon*, thus explicitly disconnecting masculinity from economic achievement and money.

Curiously, this alternative masculine subject positioning is matched by the men’s implicit discursive efforts to identify with success, career and money. This might sound contradictory, even wrong-headed, due to the fact that several research participants had deliberately abandoned their celebrated careers. Indeed, they did so in the face of being labelled crazy and irresponsible by many friends and relatives. However, despite, possibly because of this, many community members claim a subject position of *latently successful professionals* (see also Pajumets & Hearn, 2012). Many maintain that, if they wished, they could return to the corporate business world at any time. In other words, in a qualified way, they discursively continue to identify with their mainstream careers in the event their eco-community “careers” do not work out.

Leo: I could be immensely successful if I wished. (...) I could work in any advertising agency as a creative director. (...) If I wanted to, I could start working my way up right away.

To continue, while expressing distaste for “serving mammon”, some participants nevertheless position themselves as *mastering money* by attracting it almost mystically. Raul, a young and passionate eco-community leader, provides an excellent example of this shifting, ambivalent self-positioning in relation to the equivalence of power and masculinity in patriarchal capitalism:

They say that money does not grow on trees. But it does! If you have some enthusiasm, a little bit of imagination, you'll create something, and money just chases you. (...) Money is simply a flow of the energy of love.

Finally, we note that the eco-communards lay claim to a heroic and adventurous brand of masculinity even within the sustainable economy sub-discourse. They tend to portray themselves and their peers as *autonomous survivors* against the backdrop of collapsing capitalistic economy. Insisting that the 2008 financial crisis marked the beginning of the end of the capitalist economic system, they occupy themselves with designing measures that would enable their groups to survive in the event of an apocalypse.

Mirko, an eco-villager from southern Estonia, had the opportunity to rehearse that identity when a storm caused a major electric power failure a few years earlier. He seemed to enjoy his “iron” position amid this mini-collapse:

A total catastrophe raged (elsewhere). Some cities were left without electricity, with no mobile telephone service. People didn't understand what was going on. ... So, what was going on? Nothing (in my life)! I lit my candles, made a fire in the stove, and fetched some water from the well. ... My life went on ... except that the toilet did not flush by pressing the button, and I had to pour in water from a bucket. (...) I suddenly realised ... whatever happens on the outside ... I can make it. Come what may, I'll survive. You know, it was such an empowering feeling. ... I must have really needed it. I was very pleased with myself.

An interesting form of empowered heroism is articulated here. Though clearly not so in all social situations, in mainstream Western cultural imaginary the stereotypical figure of the last hero standing is most usually a man (see Whitehead, 2005).

To conclude this section, men's sustainable economy sub-discourse proves to be the context for lively, if usually implicit, negotiations of different masculine subject positions. Some present well-known forms of masculinity and masculine identity; others are more conducive to alternative masculine identity configurations. Importantly, these gender processes, along with more general hierarchy-building processes, operate within a “gender-neutral” worldview.

Doing Masculinity While Talking Community

Contemporary Estonia could justifiably be described as a highly individualistic society. Extended families, for example, essential to survival in Soviet times, considerably disintegrated in just two decades (Kutsar & Kasearu, 2010). Interviewees passionately criticised the atomisation of society. Most of them praised and practiced various antidotes: non-violent communication, consensus-based decision-making, communal meal preparation, eating and yoga, rebirthing, and

before important community discussions collective meditative chanting. Also, a pervasive taboo against being positioned as leader can be gleaned from the data. Even the men who are clearly community visionaries and organisers, even leaders, fervently protest they are no more important than other members. Instead of personifying authoritarian masculinity, men community members praised equality and unity, and positioned themselves as *servants of the people*. Leo, among many others, was an active practitioner of such an alternative masculine subject position.

Happy people are those who serve the world or others rather than themselves. ... There is a saying that the greatest of kings is he who serves his people rather than ruling them. ... He asks everyone how he or she feels. ... In that sense, he is a servant. We, too, aspire to be servants.

It seems a norm in eco-communities that group members, regardless of gender, and especially the leaders, should care and share. Hence, the subject position of a king *servicing people* refers to a novel, caring masculinity. However, as in other areas of the men eco-communards' holistic worldview, diverse, sometimes conflicting, masculine subject positions compete in their gender identity construction. For example, the kingly *servicing people* position is conducted parallel to and in competition with claims to *enlighten the masses*. Depicting himself as a saviour with vision and a mission to “awaken others’ consciousness” is more traditionally masculine in its implied transcendent authority over, rather than equality with, people. The interviewees believed it was just a matter of time and further financial, ecological and climatic catastrophes before their message will be heard by the national political-economic elite, positioned in this storyline as “joyride kids” in need of saving from themselves by the eco-communards.

Somewhat paradoxically, the sub-discourse of re-establishing community tends to give rise to identifying as *daredevil pioneers* or *adventurous scientists*, even *vanguardist positionings*. It was not at all rare for participants to claim that the mission of eco-communities is to ‘test aspects of the emerging world order’ prior to their wider adoption by society. In the next extract Jasper positions himself as a pioneer proposing establishment of a new type of community, a novel kind of lifestyle “laboratory”:

Jasper: In Europe, there are many (eco-villages in rural areas). This would not be very innovative, don't you agree? So, why not create a village in which the city and country are united? And who knows, a new quality could be created in Tallinn (the capital of Estonia)... something that could become more broadly inspiring and make a contribution to the world.

Interviewer: Are you creating a little lifestyle factory? It seems to me that your aim is to develop a totally new model of life that would also inspire others.

Jasper: I'd rather call it a laboratory.

Nudging progress along – as with a pioneer exploring the unexplored – has since the Enlightenment and the European imperialist expansions been culturally defined as a primarily masculine endeavour (Merchant, 1990). It attributes closeness to nature, animality and emotionality to women, and reason, exploration and harnessing the unknown to men for the sake of “mankind”.

Doing Masculinity While Talking Spirituality

Throughout the interviews and newspaper articles analysed it is almost a mantra that that eco-communities also concern spiritual liberation and personal growth, and that all communities that survive eventually become spiritual communities. The eco-community members typically identified with a mosaic of religious and intellectual precepts from Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Tantrism and New Age; some, for ethical reasons, follow vegetarianism. Spiritual pursuits such as “becoming a servant of God”, “universal love”, and “becoming conscious and awakened”, abound in the interviews. This is rather rare in the context of highly materialist and secular post-socialist Estonia.

Like the other sub-discourses of the gender-neutral holistic worldview, the spirituality sub-discourse can be seen as housing subtle negotiations between various masculine subject positions. At one moment a communitarian may position himself as humbled by his insignificance and inadequacy in the face of a higher spiritual force, then at the next moment claim for himself god-like attributes. Such a (not so) subtle transition from humble to a bold masculine subjectivity is exemplified in Raul’s reflections on one of his recent meditative journeys. He begins:

What did I feel at that moment? ... I felt, I decided, nothing ... Because I was one hundred, no, one hundred and one percent subdued. There was nothing left that I wanted ...

Raul positions himself as “no one” – a man who has totally renounced his ego. He is neither dominating nor self-assertive. He presents himself as humble as an individual can be – certainly humbler than tolerated by Estonian society. Soon, however, a significant shift occurs in Raul’s subjectivity. He is transformed into a *benevolent God*.

... My personal will had evolved into striving to become a servant of God, a servant of life or ... perhaps, a God, ... not as some kind of religious figure, of course, but as a manifestation of the pure energy of love behind imagination.

One can observe the ease with which the loftiest identity claim can grow from complete modesty. While one might argue that invoking “God” does not necessarily represent a gendered masculine position, in the cultural context of the interview this appeal to transcendent masculinity was clear (Cameron & Frazer, 1987). Subject positions one might presume as antithetical are intertwined; delineating boundaries between them is difficult; language here is volatile, flexible, devoid of loyalties.

Another powerful subject position what might be called the *supreme agent* recurs in the spirituality sub-discourse. In addition to communards’ belief that they have total control over their own lives, they aspire to shape the future of the world, with the help of a few colleagues. The participants rarely reported feeling constrained by structural and external conditions; on the contrary, in their discursive world they possess almost unrestricted agency. Oliver provides an example of the *supreme agent* identity in responding to a question about his community’s goals.

Oliver: I’m talking about (being part of) a balancing act between 51 and 49 percent, between good and evil, God and The Devil, plus and minus. It’s like in Parliament: if 51 percent vote in favour, the case is closed. (...) We (mankind) do not know when we are crossing that line. But when it happens, everything becomes crazy. (...) Remember The Flood that Christians and others talk about? We cannot predict what will surprise us this time (laughs). (...) However, there are a few individuals, groups and communities who help to ward off this type of catastrophe.

Interviewer: Really?

Oliver: Yes. In fact, about twenty efficient communities should be able to keep the world more or less in balance. We have no concept of the efforts Tibetan yogis are making somewhere in the mountains, although they are the ones making it possible for us to enjoy a hamburger down here.

Interviewer: Isn’t it hugely ambitious to want to be among those twenty?

Oliver: To my mind, it’s totally realistic, not so huge at all. (...) Those born earlier don’t get it, but (laughs) progress has to come from somewhere, doesn’t it?

Oliver does not explicitly claim to be a tough man, and he would most likely disagree with our interpretation. He would probably maintain that he simply wants to serve humankind, possibly that he would be willing to die for the cause if necessary. However, it could also be argued that Oliver claims the position of a patriarch, judging from how he juxtaposes his community with Parliament, the highest power of the State, threatens the masses with catastrophe, and then consoles them by promising to save them. Claims for *supreme agency* can also be observed in his vision of his community’s spiritual mission, as well as his confidence in its ability to perform this “balancing act”. One might see this control and self-assurance in the statements of mainstream political and economic leaders or aspirations of ancient mythological figures.

Finally, we note the *promoting progress* position that recurs in and brings together several sub-discourses of the holistic worldview. The notion of progress springing from the

Enlightenment views the natural environment as a domain to be controlled by rational men, modern science and technology. It could be argued this gave rise to a mentality that has led to current ecological crises. The eco-communards' identifications with furthering progress and development might be difficult to reconcile with the principle of respecting Nature. This discrepancy again references a lack of reflexivity and intentionality in men's positioning themselves as *powerful* and as *men* in their discourse.

Discussion

We now return to our two overarching aims. We address these in reverse order, beginning with the question of “non-gendered gendering” in eco-communities, a site that might appear characterised by political radicalism, and that ‘may be (a) midwife in terms of gender politics’ (Connell, 1990, p. 476; also 1995, p. 141). We have examined the processes whereby implicit masculinity discourses, lacking explicit gendering, seem to operate within a worldview central to eco-communities, thereby constructing masculine identities. Thus, can eco-communities be seen as a revolutionary site from where masculinities that are more caring towards the nature as well as other people (women as well as other men) could arise? Could they even be a hatchery for “ecological masculinity”, as Hultman and Pulé (2018) have coined it recently? Our analysis, of eco-communard men's unplanned masculinity work does not fully support this hope. While interviewees certainly and repeatedly expressed respect, care and even servitude towards other human beings they just as often lapsed into claiming superiority and building hierarchies. Our analysis reveals complex negotiations between alternative, as well as more well-known masculine subject positions. Thus, ecological sensitivity is not necessarily sufficient for revolutionising gender relations, at least in this post-socialist context.

This ambivalent result needs to be placed in the context of previous research on gender relations in communes. As noted, several previous studies have demonstrated that gender practices in such communities do not necessarily match the study subjects' alleged egalitarian ideals and may reproduce rather patriarchal attitudes and gender inequalities (Kanter, 1972; Minturn, 1984; Kleineman, 1996; Vihma, 2008). In contrast, Eräranta, Moisander and Pesonen (2009) have suggested that eco-communards may subvert the nuclear family and gendered organisation of intimacy. They studied Finnish communes that were predominantly female and middle-aged, while our informants presented as male and rather younger. It would seem that

younger post-socialist eco-community men construct gender more conservatively. Thus, Connell (1990, 1995; Ouzgane & Coleman, 1998) may be overly optimistic regarding some men's gender egalitarianism when involved in eco-politics. However, elsewhere Connell (1995, p. 142) also acknowledges: '(f)or the most part the environmental movement ... tries to work on a non-gendered basis. It even tries to be degendering, to undo gender differentiation. ... The problem is that a degendering practice in a still patriarchal society can be demobilising as well as progressive.'

Language has no loyalties (Burr 1995, p. 46); rather, material-discursive context determines what a term, such as "natural" or "environment", stands for in a specific moment. Such specific contexts of and subject positions within environmentalism and eco-communities have diverse, even contradictory, gender political implications. The post-socialist context here is especially complex, with its sometimes contradictory references to tradition, rurality and community, for example. While Estonian eco-communities often represent discontinuities from the past and the post-socialist present, their "gender-neutral" constructions seem to draw on pre-socialist traditions, socialist rhetorical "gender equality", and post-socialist cultural masculinisation of society.

In moving now to our other, more general aim, we have focused on the social category of gender, and specifically how gendered identity constructions are reproduced through *not* doing gender explicitly, in this case, by men. We have presented the less explicit discursive constructions of masculine identity within "gender-neutral" material-discursive fields. There are several ways of understanding these kinds of practices. Men's identities are typically unmarked, not usually *gender-conscious* activities (Egeberg Holmgren & Hearn, 2009): they "just happen". Men's practices (re)producing gender inequality are often heavily embedded in existing social, economic and cultural relations, so that men's dominant or complicit practices may be equated with what is considered and counts as the "normal", usual, or even official ways of doing things.

At the more general analytical level, the question of which one of the two material-discursive fields – that of masculinity or that of the gender-neutral holistic worldview – is primary, and which occupies an auxiliary position, must be left open. It could be that the communards present their gender-neutral holistic worldview only as a backdrop for the major discursive endeavour to construct gender identity, rather than *vice versa*. If gender is assumed to have a "master" status – that a person is always gendered whatever s/he is engaged in – then

negotiating gender identity is best understood as a continuous process pervading all levels of social interaction. Not surprisingly, claiming agency or control over such a process is difficult.

Finally, while our focus in this chapter has been on gendering within non-gendering with eco-communes, it is likely that similar processes of disarticulation (McRobbie, 2009) may occur in other social contexts and with other social divisions. For example, national liberationist struggles may play down other struggles that are seen as less urgent, such as around gender equality. These kinds of contradiction have wider implications not just for gendered ecological transformations but for systems of oppression more generally. As such, they expose the need to transform and “de-hegemonise” social relations, not only in gendered and ecological contexts but far beyond, against hierarchicalisation on multiple dimensions.

References

- Allaste, A.-A. (2011). *Ökokogukonnad retoorikas ja praktikas* [Eco communities: rhetoric and praxis]. Tallinn: Tallinn University Press.
- Allaste, A.-A. (Ed.). (2013). *'Back in the West': Changing lifestyles in transforming societies*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang.
- Balkmar, D., & Hearn, J. (2019). Men, automobility, movements, and the environment: Imagining (un)sustainable, automated transport futures. In J. Hearn, E. Vasquez del Aguila and M. Hughson (eds.) *The unsustainable institutions of men: Transnational dispersed centres, gender power, contradictions* (pp. 139–154). London: Routledge.
- Brough, A.R., Wilkie, J.E.B., Ma, J., Isaac, M.S., & Gal, D. (2016). Is eco-friendly unmanly? The green-feminine stereotype and its effect on sustainable consumption, *Journal of Consumer Research*, 43(4), 567–582.
- Bryant, K. (2019). Arnold Schwarzenegger Helped Greta Thunberg Acquire a Tesla. *Vanity Fair*, October 1 2019. <https://www.vanityfair.com/style/2019/10/greta-thunberg-arnold-schwarzenegger-tesla> (downloaded 14.11.2019).
- Burr, V. (1995). *An introduction to social constructionism*. London: Routledge.
- Cameron, D., & Frazer, E. (1987). *The lust to kill*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Cockburn, C. (1988). Masculinity, the left, and feminism. In R. Chapman & J. Rutherford (Eds.), *Male order: Unwrapping masculinity* (pp. 303–329). London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- Connell, R. (1990). A whole new world: remaking masculinity in the context of the environmental movement. *Gender and Society*, 4(4), 452–478.
- Connell, R. (1993). The big picture: Masculinities in recent world history. *Theory and Society*, 22(5), 597–623.
- Connell, R. (1995). *Masculinities*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Connell, R. (2005/2007). Globaliseerumine, imperialism ja mehelikkused. *Ariadne Lõng*, VII(1 & 2), 77–99.
- Dahl, E. (2011). Män pratar miljö: Diskursiva maskuliniteter i mäns samtal om klimatförändringar och miljövänliga resor [Men talking about the environment: discursive masculinities in men's talk about climate change and sustainable travel], *Tidskrift för genusvetenskap*, 4, 109–137.

- Davies, B., & Harre, R. (1990). Positioning: The social construction of selves. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 20(1), 43–63.
- Easlea, B. (1983). *Fathering the unthinkable: Masculinity, scientists and the nuclear arms race*. London: Pluto.
- Egeberg Holmgren, L., & Hearn, J. (2009). Framing ‘men in feminism’: Theoretical locations, local contexts and practical passings in men’s gender-conscious positionings on gender equality and feminism. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 18(4), 403–418.
- Enarson, E., & Pease, B. (Eds.), (2016). *Men, masculinities and disaster*. London: Routledge.
- Eräranta, K., Moisander, J., & Pesonen, S. (2009). Narratives of self and relatedness in eco-communes: Resistance against normalized individualization and the nuclear family. *European Societies*, 11(3), 347–367.
- Eurostat (2016). Gender pay gap in unadjusted form (accessed June 25 2019).
- Davidson, D. J., & Freudenburg, W. R. (1996). Gender and environmental risk concerns: A review and analysis of available research. *Environment and Behavior*, 28(3), 302–339.
- Global Ecovillage Network webpage (2019) (accessed November 28 2019).
- Hankewitz, S. (2018). Estonian youngsters second least religious in Europe. *Estonian World*, March 24, 2018.
- Harré, R. T. & van Langenhove, L. (Eds.) (1999). *Positioning theory: Moral contexts of intentional action*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Hawkins, R., & Ojeda, D. (2011). Gender and environment: Critical tradition and new challenges. *Environment and Planning D-Society & Space*, 29(2), 237–253.
- Hearn, J. (1987). *The gender of oppression; Men, masculinity and the critique of Marxism*. Brighton: Wheatsheaf; New York: St. Martin’s.
- Hearn, J. (1998). Theorizing men and men’s theorizing: Men’s discursive practices in theorizing men. *Theory and Society*, 27(6), 781–816.
- Hearn, J. (2015). *Men of the World*. London: Sage.
- Hultman, M. (2013). The making of an environmental hero: A history of ecomodern masculinity, fuel cells and Arnold Schwarzenegger. *Environmental Humanities*, 2, 79–99.
- Hultman, M., & Pulé, P. M. (2018). *Ecological masculinities. Theoretical foundations and practical guidance*. London: Routledge.
- Hunter, L. M., Hatch, A., & Johnson, A. (2004). Cross-national gender variation in environmental behaviours. *Social Science Quarterly*, 85(3), 677–694.
- Kanter, R. M. (1972). *Commitment and community: Communes and utopias in sociological perspective*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.
- Kleinman, S. (1996). *Opposing ambitions: Gender and identity in an alternative organization*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Kutsar, D., & Kasearu, K. (2010). Informal support networks in changing society - are family-based networks being ‘crowded out’? *Studies of Transition States and Societies*, 2(1), 6–73.
- McRobbie, A. (2009). *The aftermath of feminism*. London: Sage.
- Merchant, C. (1990). *The death of nature: Women, ecology, and the scientific revolution*. San Francisco CA: Harper & Row.
- Minturn, L. (1984). Sex-role differentiation in contemporary communes. *Sex Roles*, 10(1/2), 73–85.
- Narusk, A., & Kandolin, I. (1997). Social well-being and gender: Post-Soviet Estonia and the welfare state Finland. *Scandinavian Journal of Social Welfare*, 6(2), 127–136.
- Novikova, I., & Kambourov, D. (Eds.). (2003). *Men and masculinities in the global*

- world: Integrating postsocialist perspectives*. Helsinki: Kikumora.
- Novikova, I., Pringle, K., Hearn, J., Müller, U., Oleksy, E., Chernova, J., ... Ventimiglia, C. (2005). Men, masculinities and 'Europe'. In M. Kimmel, J. Hearn, & R. W. Connell (Eds.), *Handbook of studies on men and masculinities* (pp. 141–162). Thousand Oaks CA: Sage.
- Novikova, I. (Ed.), (2008). *Gender matters in the Baltics*. Riga: Latvijas universitāte.
- Occhipinti, L. (1996). Two steps back?: Anti-feminism in Eastern Europe. *Anthropology Today*, 12(6), 13–18.
- Ouzgane, L., & Coleman, D. (1998). Cashing out the patriarchal dividends: An interview with R. W. Connell. *Jouvert. A Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, 2(1). Retrieved from <https://legacy.chass.ncsu.edu/jouvert/v2i1/CONNELL.HTM>
- Pajumets, M. (2011). Mõõdukalt alternatiivsed maskuliinsused: ökokogukondliku elustiilieelistusega meeste suhestumine töö ja eneseostusega [Moderately alternative masculinities: Male eco communards' relations to work and self-determination]. In A.-A. Allaste (Ed.), *Ökokogukonnad retoorikas ja praktikas* [Eco communities in rhetoric and praxis] (pp. 197–223). Tallinn: Tallinn University Press.
- Pajumets, M. (2012). Post-Socialist Masculinities, Identity Work, and Social Change: An Analysis of Discursive (Re)constructions of Gender Identity in Novel Social Situations. *Tallinn: Tallinn University Dissertations on Social Sciences 60*.
- Pajumets, M., & Hearn, J. (2012). Post-socialist fathers 'at home' and 'away from home' in 'Old Europe': Facing the challenge through masculine identity talk. *STSS: Studies of Transition States and Societies*, 4(1), 31–47.
- Pilvre, B. (2011). *Naiste meediarepresentatsioon Eesti ajakirjanduskultuuri ja ühiskonna Kontekstis* [Representations of women in Estonian media and society]. *Dissertationes de Mediis et Communicationibus Universitatis Tartuensis 12*. Tartu: Tartu Ülikooli Kirjastus.
- Pilvre, B. (2013). Estonian men's lifestyle magazine 'Mees': A manual of masculine identity in a transition society. In A.-A. Allaste (Ed.), *'Back in the West': Changes and continuities of lifestyles in transforming societies* (pp. 97–122). Frankfurt: Peter Lang.
- Räty, R. and Carlsson-Kanyama, A. (2010). Energy consumption by gender in some European countries. *Energy Policy* 38(1), 646–649.
- Strange, P. (1983). *It'll make a man of you: A feminist view of the arms race*. Nottingham: Mushroom.
- Vihma, P. (2008). *Different yet equal? Green ideology and gender roles: A case study* (Unpublished master's thesis). Tallinn University.
- Vihma, P. (2011). Maheporgandist auramõõtmiseni. Eesti ökokogukondade tüüpid [From mild grown carrot to measuring auras. A typology of Estonian eco communities]. In A.-A. Allaste (Ed.), *Ökokogukonnad retoorikas ja praktikas* [Eco communities: rhetoric and praxis] (pp. 67–100). Tallinn: Tallinn University Press.
- Warren, K. J. (1990). The power and the promise of ecological feminism. *Environmental Ethics*, 12(2), 125–146.
- Whitehead, A. (2005). Man to man violence: How masculinity may work as a dynamic risk Factor. *The Howard Journal*, 44(4), 411–422.
- Zelezny, L. C., Chua, P.-P., & Aldrich, C. (2000). Elaborating on gender differences in environmentalism. *Journal of Social Issues*, 56(3), 443–457.