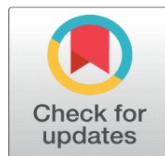
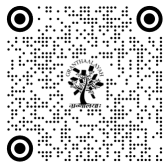


NAVIGATING ECO-GRIEF: READING THE INTERSECTION OF WOMEN AND THE ROLE OF MEDIA IN PROVIDING MENTAL SOLACE

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ABSTRACT

Global environmental degradation and its implications on mental health off late has been receiving scholarly attention. The lived experience of environmental pain and its associated notion, Eco-Grief, is used to describe the long-term emotional impact of environmental and climate change-related disasters. Eco-Grief refers to a deep sense of sorrow brewing from environmental degradation and concerns about potential future ecological damage. These intense emotions, also known as "eco-mourning," can drastically affect the mental well-being, especially during times of alarming global events like pandemic and several other climate crises. Historically, women have been acknowledged for their crucial roles in environmental preservation. As women are closely connected to nature, they often suffer the most during climate crisis. Women's strong bond with the environment makes them more vulnerable to the impacts of environmental degradation and natural disasters. The effects of the climate crisis on them are not only physical but it also triggers a deep sense of emotional responses like sadness, helplessness, guilt, anxiety, numbness etc. In society, though the media primarily provides information, education and entertainment, it also serves as a tool for recreation and fulfilling cognitive and emotional needs.

In this context, the paper aims to explore how the media can console women experiencing eco-grief and examine the potential of media assistance in navigating these arduous emotional encounters. Furthermore, it shall examine how the coverage of the media on environmental issues can lessen the intensity of eco-grief. In the process, the role of social media campaigns, awareness programmes and documentaries in raising awareness and providing coping mechanisms shall be extensively investigated through the lens of eco-grief.

Keywords: Eco-Grief, Eco-Mourning, Media, Women, Consolation

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1. INTRODUCTION

Environmental pain and several new terms related to climate change disaster have been introduced to describe the long-term emotional effects of environmental change. Ecological grief is the grief that is felt in response to experienced or anticipated ecological loss which may rise due to grave environmental disasters.

According to Cavanagh, an environmental critic, one in every six Hurricane Katrina survivors matched the criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder, while crop-damaging heat waves have been linked to an increase in suicide rates in India. The authors of a systematic review of the mental health effects of climate change (eg, heat waves, floods;) conducted a study on the Greenland population, where 15% of participants reported strong fear with regard to the changing climate, while hopelessness was reported by 6%, sadness and guilt by 7% and anger by 5%. Although both climate grief and environmental anxiety are relatively new terms, climate grief is commonly used to describe sadness associated with environmental loss, while eco-anxiety refers to fears of future loss. Climate pain is a psychological response to the environmental losses associated with climate change

According to Ellwood unlike climatic pain, "Solastalgia" refers to the environmental losses with which it is directly linked. It has been observed that individuals are becoming more and more affected by these planetary changes and the resulting ecological losses in their daily lives, and these changes pose serious direct and indirect risks to people's mental health and well-being. Eminent critic Cunsolo & Ellis, are of the opinion that climate change, and the associated impacts on land and environment, for example, have recently been linked to a range of negative mental health impacts, including depression, suicidal ideation, post-traumatic stress, as well as feelings of anger, hopelessness, distress, and despair. Pain due to slow changes, such as the loss of ice or changing environmental conditions over time, is another way that people experience environmental pain. For example, like other forms of pain, people experiencing environmental pain may experience physical and physiological responses to loss or experience changes in their worldview.

2. OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of this paper is to understand the intricacies of media and its role as a means of consoling women with eco-grief. In addition to that, this paper will also examine how media can be used as an instrument or platform to provide respite to women during eco-mourning.

3. DATA SOURCES AND METHODOLOGY

The paper is descriptive in nature and a comprehensive study is done to examine the relation between Eco-Grief & Media. The paper analysed secondary data collected from Books, journals, newspapers, magazines, and sources of the internet are also used as a secondary source of data. Relevant Govt. reports relevant to the study were also used for data during this study.

4. UNDERSTANDING ECO-GRIEF

The intense feelings, known as Eco-grief or "eco-mourning," can negatively impact mental health, especially when current events such as a global pandemic or natural disaster are taking place. Psychologists today use the term climate pain to refer to feelings of sadness, loss, and anxiety in response to the devastation of the climate. Climate pain can be experienced as deep sadness, helplessness, guilt, anxiety, or numbness associated with the climate crisis. According to the critic Ellwood climate mourning can also be directed at the future loss of others, manifesting as sadness and concern for future generations who will inherit an impoverished planet.

Pain can also be the result of stress and anxiety associated with slow, creeping environmental changes, or feelings which many of us experience when winters get incredibly warm and extreme weather events to become more frequent. However, if one is functioning relatively well, the anxiety and pain of changes in the natural world, while unpleasant and sometimes painful, can also be understood as emotions that can help people achieve productive and positive change, including an energetic commitment to implementing climate solutions. If they are properly supported. It is for these reasons that the pain of loss in the natural world can seem, in the words of the American ecologist Phyllis Windle, irrational, inappropriate, and anthropomorphic. Although grief is well understood in connection with human loss, bereavement is rarely considered something we do in connection with loss in the natural world.

Rather, environmental pain draws our attention to the emotional and psychological toll we personally endure when changes or deaths occur in the natural world. As eminent environmental thinker Johnson refers to eco-pain as the feelings of fear, anxiety, anger and pain associated with our intertwined environmental and social crises, the emotions associated with climate chaos and its devastating effects on people, places and all living beings on our planet such as home. Ecological grief is experienced due to ongoing or anticipated environmental loss, disruption of environmental knowledge and loss of place-based identity due to environmental change, and associated environmental anxiety arising from climate change and subsequent impacts on people and places are two terms that are increasingly used in both academic and popular places. Along with these mental health impacts, environmental anxiety (i.e., fear and stress about predicted threats to essential ecosystems) and environmental pain (i.e., pain associated with environmental loss) associated with climate change are on the rise. Although environmental anxiety not fully understood psychological phenomena, research is emerging.

Research shows that people are increasingly experiencing the effects of these planetary changes and associated environmental losses in their daily lives, which pose significant direct and indirect threats to mental health and well-being. In addition to the well-known effects of natural disasters on mental health, this will deepen our understanding of the psychological phenomena associated with climate change and help reduce the mental distress of people affected by environmental distress, while improving their ability to recover from action. It is believed that viewing environmental suffering as a rational response to environmental loss is an important first step toward humanizing climate change and its impacts, and expanding our understanding of what it means to be human in the Anthropocene. According to eminent thinker Aylward It is important to legitimize the process of mourning environmental and climate change losses by naming environmental pain and anxiety and helping children and teens cope with it.

While environmental pain and anxiety are reasonable and functional responses to the losses associated with climate change, given the expected increase in emotional stress, anxiety and pain among the population of society, families, researchers, educators and politicians. Continuing to explore environmental pain, Ashley Cansolo and Courtney Howard found that after they shared their findings publicly, they often received a stream of people to share their experiences of stress, anxiety, depression, and despair in the face of danger. our changing climate. As terms like "environmental anxiety", "climate pain" and "pre-traumatic stress" become more common, the climate movement is starting to take emotions seriously. While recognizing that emotions often spur people to action, it is possible that feelings of environmental anxiety and pain, while uncomfortable, are in fact a

crucible that humanity must go through in order to gain the energy and conviction necessary for vital change.

Although little is known about this area of environmental pain, a research in northern Canada and rural Australia and a report from eco America and the American Psychological Association 19 indicate that it is pain that arises from worrying about or preparing for future loss and lamenting the expected future which will probably cease to exist. Seen in this light, eco grief can also challenge fundamental assumptions about what we choose to value and what we choose to suffer and cry including the environmental loss and degradation caused by climate change.

5. SITUATING WOMEN WITHIN AN ECOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Women have always played an important role in the environment, from their role as primary caretakers to their role as custodians of conservation efforts. But today, women are making an even larger impact on the environment, from their role in fighting climate change to their role in preserving wildlife habitat to their role in generating energy. Women and the environment are closely linked. The actions and decisions women make affect the environment and, in turn, the environment affects women. Women's roles in the environment, such as choosing to use energy-efficient appliances, can help reduce environmental impacts, such as climate change. But women are also affected by the environment, such as the availability and price of clean energy. Eminent ecofeminist Vandana Shiva in her book *Ecofeminism* rightfully remarks on how women are inextricably associated with nature. She embarks on how climate change disproportionately affects women.

Women have long been a driving force for environmental action. From the first Earth Day in 1970 to the present day, women have made up the majority of environmental activists. They have organized protests, lobbied government officials, and even blocked bridges and highways to draw attention to the need to protect our environment. Women have also been a driving force behind several environmental movements such as Tebhaga Movement and Chipko movement.

The Green Belt movement, which drew inspiration from India's Chipko movement, is one of the most well-known environmental movements led by women in the world and in Africa. This is an indigenous grassroots movement based in Nairobi, Kenya that promotes holistic development by emphasising environmental conservation, community development, and capacity building. Wangari Maathai founded the Green Belt Movement in 1977 in response to the needs of rural Kenyan women who reported that their streams were drying up, their food supplies were becoming less secure, and they had to walk further and further to get firewood for fuel and fencing. The movement encouraged women to collaborate in growing seedlings and planting trees to bind the soil and store rainwater.

Women can be seen actively participating and inspiring many indigenous movements to preserve the ecology across the globe and prime example of that is the Appiko movement of the 1980s to save forests in Karnataka's Uttara Kannada region. The Appiko Andolan raised environmental awareness in southern India, with a large number of rural women taking part. With development, major industries such as a pulp and paper mill, a plywood factory, and a chain of hydroelectric dams sprouted in the area. These industries overexploited forest resources, and dams submerged vast forest and agricultural areas. By 1980, the forest had shrunk to

about a quarter of its original size. The Appiko Movement was formed in response to this crisis and aims to save the Western Ghats.

“Across the regions and cultures of the world, women play critical roles in relation to their natural environment. Often deeply dependent on available natural resources for food, fuel and shelter, women can be particularly vulnerable to environmental changes or threats. Because women’s workload is often centred on managing natural resources, biodiversity and ecosystems, their experiences and perspectives are essential to sustainable development policy making and actions at every level, for a healthy planet for generations to come.” (Aragon and Miller)

6. MEDIA AS AN AGENT OF MENTAL SOLACE

There is no longer debate about the impact of the media on the thinking, behaviour, and emotions of the general population. On contrary the effects of media can be pro-social or anti-social. Mass media serve as socializing agents that aids in construction and perpetuation of perceptions and learned behaviours. To understand how media inform people and its effect on the attitude, behaviour and views of an individual it will be ideal to apply two theories of mass communication i.e. the "social cognitive theory" and the "cultivation theory".

According to Albert Bandura, the foundation of social cognitive theory is the idea of human agency, which contends that people actively participate in their own growth and have some degree of control over their ideas, feelings, and behaviours. There are three ways that agencies operate. When one uses their own power to shape how they behave and how they interact with their surroundings, they are exhibiting individual agency. People can also use proxy agency, in which another person negotiates benefits on their behalf, to get the results they want. Finally, individuals engage in collective agency when they cooperate to further shared goals. Additionally, agency has four fundamental characteristics: foresight, self-reactivity, self-reflection, and intentionality.

S.K.Padhy rightfully claims that the "symbolizing capability" is a crucial element in social cognitive theory, emphasizing that individuals translate fleeting experiences into cognitive models using symbols as guides for judgment and action. Portrayals of individuals dealing with mental illness serve as symbolic representations of mental health, offering viewers a virtual understanding of what it's like to experience mental health challenges. Television serves as a prominent medium for conveying these vicarious experiences. According to the cultivation theory, repeated exposure to such experiences on television can potentially shape the viewer's reality. In essence, the theory suggests that individuals who extensively watch television are more likely to adopt opinions and values aligning with those depicted in the content they consume.

Cultivation theory examines the long-term effects of television viewing on viewers’ conceptions of social reality. Cultivation analysis initiated as part of the Cultural Indicators Project founded by George Gerbner in the late 1960s. “The most general hypothesis of cultivation analysis is that those who spend more time "living" in the world of television are more likely to see the "real world" in terms of the images, values, portrayals, and ideologies that emerge through the lens of television.” (Gerbner et al 58.)

“Serving as a central source of information, mass media not only reflects public attitudes and values but also take part in shaping them. The effects of mass media are partly unintentional due to news and entertainment programs. However, the media also do this intentionally for monetary gain (by advertisements), achieving

social good (sponsored programs), or political purpose (biased or “paid” news). Media have played a role in breaking down misconceptions and myths about homosexuality, leprosy, and HIV/AIDS.” (Srivastava et al 1)

Numerous studies have shown that media platforms are the worst for people's mental health, including sadness, identity crises, body image problems, and FOMO (fear of missing out). However in spite of all, there is some comfort to be found in media in the shape of a support system for many who require assistance or simply wish to know they are not alone. Media acts as a support system for others while providing a platform for people to speak about mental health challenges through the mediums of art, poetry, and illustrations.

The practice of community healing can be one means through which media provides a platform for individuals to speak about mental health issues through art, poetry and illustrations as the medium, as well as acting as a support system for others. Also in case of feeling lonely, depressed or fear of losing the media can be a great space for escapism and distraction.

Being dependent on media may not be recommended treatment for a serious mental health situation such as eco-grief still, but access to quality mental healthcare remains elusive for many, and specifically marginalized communities like women in many parts of developing and least developing countries but this strategy may not go away any time soon. (Walters)

Resilience is defined as a material's capacity to retain the ability to restore itself to its initial state while absorbing the energy from a hit. It denotes a society's capacity to respond to mounting pressure, recover from a crisis, and accommodate drastic changes. Individual resilience is developed both inwardly and externally through coping mechanisms, self-control, and social support systems within the society. The majority of people overcome hardship with healthy adjustment and without developing psychopathology. Media can operate as a mediator and provide a mechanism for the development of a collective resilience strategy for women through its content. By offering a way to escape from reality, it has the power to distance people from the harsh realities of life. Many research has demonstrated that media can be a useful alternative for starting and implementing radical transformation. By formalising environment-related disaster among women as a new normal and cultivating a general understanding of it, it gradually and slowly cultivates changes and acceptance in women.

Media can cultivate active coping in eco-grief and substantiate a methodology of self-regulation among the women who are the worst affected in the ecological loose. Active coping involves a cognitive idea of maintaining self-thought, self-evaluation and regulation of self-behaviour. Media can play the role of catalyst or itself can be the source when women seek solutions and support. Media can be effectively used to manage stress in daily life in addition to contributing to it. The use of media for coping may have increased in our media-saturated environment. (Nabi et al. 51) For example, TV shows and social networking sites can be used as a way to escape from stressful life events computer games can be used to escape from daily troubles (Reinecke 126), blogs and health websites can be utilised for information gathering and problem-solving (Chung and Kim 297).

People who can change their perspective and look for the good in their situation typically fare better than those who struggle to control their thoughts, emotions, and behaviours. Revaluating one's situation in a positive light makes it easier to move on rather than getting caught in a vicious circle of negative feelings. A person's ability to experience pleasant emotions during a difficult period is also likely influenced by their optimism, which may aid in their ability to recover and manage.

An analysis of low-income moms who had survived Hurricane Katrina revealed that optimism had aided their recovery and development. Of course, if the anticipated outcome does not materialise, excessive optimism may leave one disappointed or surprised; as a result, the proper balance is required. (Lowe et al.877)

Climate café is another innovative measurement where media can play a proactive role in providing solace in eco-grief for women. Climate Café is a discussion forum, with the goal of addressing this feeling of isolation and promoting dialogue in a secure, guilt- and shame-free setting. The purpose of a Climate Café is to discuss climate change and associated feelings in a casual setting such as a coffee shop, library, or online meeting. (Wu 13) Scotland's Climate Café Media is one of several media spaces designed for journalists and broadcasters to learn about the climate emergency, discuss its effects on the community's women, and offer creative solutions.

A survey by the Yale Program on Climate Communication found that in Fall, 2019, almost one-third (31%) of the U.S. expressed alarm about climate change (*Americans Are Increasingly "Alarmed" About Global Warming - Yale Program on Climate Change Communication*). The Climate Circle Model is one such action where a groups that assist members in expressing their emotions related to climate change can reduce stress, foster a sense of community, and boost resiliency and resolution ("Climate Circle"). As Climate Cafe is a fantastic method to foster community and conversation about climate change, its effects, and coping mechanisms, and involve those who might not otherwise be engaged, media can offer an engaging platform for women.

People seek the emotional and practical assistance of individuals who are near to them during trying times, including family, friends, and neighbours. Higher levels of social support during and after a disaster are linked to lower rates of psychological suffering, according to research. Years after a calamity like a hurricane, the effects of a strong social support network on one's mental health or the detrimental effects of a weaker social support network might linger. As previously said, a media-centred platform or group or any other close-knit social network can offer important emotional and financial support to women especially.

7. CONCLUSION

Thus, it is evident from the foregoing discussion that, despite the fact that the majority of media research and studies have attempted to examine the impact and role of media in a negative manner, media can be a source that offers a platform for women to speak about mental health issues. A framework for the development of a collective resilience strategy for the women can be provided by the media, acting as a mediator. The media can support a form of self-regulation in the women who are most adversely impacted by ecological loose and encourage active coping in eco-grief.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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