

Women and Nature: An Ecofeminist Study of Environmental Conservation Sustainability

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Abstract:

Global issues include the exploitation of women and the environment exacerbated by patriarchy and capitalism. These structures lead to gender inequality and environmental degradation, especially in rural areas. However, women play a key role in conservation, such as in the Green Belt Movement in Kenya and the Chipko Movement in India. In Indonesia, Dayak women use traditional knowledge to fight against palm oil expansion. Ecofeminism offers an approach that combines gender and environmental issues for equitable sustainability. This study used a literature review method to examine ecofeminism and the role of women in environmental conservation. The sources used included relevant and credible journals, books, and reports from environmental organizations. The study focused on identifying key themes related to gender and conservation and exploring multiple perspectives to deepen understanding of the dynamics studied. This process involved rigorous evaluation of sources to ensure relevance and reliability, assisting in developing a conceptual framework that guides systematic analysis and draws logical and detailed conclusions. The results of this study show that ecofeminism critiques patriarchal structures that subordinate women and nature, often the target of exploitation. This approach promotes the integration of gender analysis in ecology for inclusive, sustainable development, emphasizing the important role of women as agents of change for a more equitable world. Ecofeminism emphasizes women's involvement in resource management and conservation leadership and their role as key agents in environmental justice and gender-sensitive policy-making.

Keywords: ecofeminist, environment, women

Introduction

The exploitation of women and nature is an interconnected global issue driven by patriarchal and capitalist systems that create domination and double exploitation (Buckingham, 2015; Seren, 2023; Wahyono, 2024). Patriarchy places women in a subordinate position, while capitalism exploits this inequality to exploit women's labor and natural resources for economic gain (Rowland, 2015; Wieczorek, 2018; Limoudehi & Bakhtvar, 2020). As a result, rural women who depend on natural resources daily are the most vulnerable to environmental damage such as deforestation, water pollution, and climate change (Workneh, 2020; Filho et al., 2023; Sullivan & Hickel, 2023). However, women also play a significant role in environmental conservation, as demonstrated by the Green Belt Movement in Kenya and the Chipko Movement in India, which have successfully led community-based struggles against environmental degradation (Singh, 2018; Nguyen & Rydstrom, 2018; Tran, 2021). In Indonesia, Dayak women face threats from oil palm expansion but continue to play a role in conservation based on traditional knowledge (Purwanto et al., 2020; Niko et al., 2023;

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Niko et al., 2024). An ecofeminist approach, which integrates gender and environmental issues, offers strategic solutions for more inclusive and equitable sustainability.

Ecofeminism has become a critical approach to patriarchal dominance, exploring women's contributions to environmental protection globally. Bangun's (2020) research shows women as key players in natural resource management, fighting for justice and equality. Hosseinnezhad (2017) found that women are more serious about protecting the environment, such as inefficient energy consumption and waste management. Nofrima et al. (2023) define women as agents of change in the context of climate change and sustainable development. Meanwhile, Phillips (2020) suggests an ecocentric approach integrating humans into a wider web of life, encouraging an inclusive epistemological framework. Riady (2021) examine the Chipko Movement, which has integrated gender into environmental policy and become an example for the global environmental movement. Duru et al (2022) and Bryan et al (2024) reveals the impact of environmental damage on women in rural communities, and Niko (2017) highlights the connection between Dayak women and nature. The current research examines and analyzes the role of women in environmental conservation through an ecofeminist approach. Their role is often overlooked in environmental policies, even though they have great potential in realizing sustainability. In addition, in a patriarchal and capitalist system that tends to exploit natural resources without limits, women can offer a different perspective through an approach based on justice, empathy, and local knowledge.

This study aims to analyze and highlight the significant role of women in environmental conservation through the lens of ecofeminism. This study aims to reveal how women's roles are often overlooked in environmental policies despite their great potential to realize sustainability. Through this approach, the study attempts to integrate ecofeminist principles into environmental conservation strategies, which are expected to not only strengthen gender equity but also ecological sustainability globally. The benefits of this study are manifold. First, by highlighting the key role of women, this study can encourage more inclusive and equitable conservation policies and practices. Second, adopting an ecofeminist perspective in environmental conservation can promote a more holistic and sustainable approach, given that women often bring local knowledge and empathy to resource management. Finally, this study can provide new insights into how to address the uncontrolled exploitation of natural resources in patriarchal and capitalist systems, resulting in more effective and sustainable conservation strategies.

The central hypothesis of this study is that integrating ecofeminist principles into environmental conservation strategies will improve gender equity and ecological sustainability globally. Several more specific subsidiary hypotheses support this hypothesis: First, applying ecofeminist principles to conservation policies will increase women's participation in decision-making related to natural resource management. Second, integrating ecofeminism into conservation strategies is expected to strengthen justice- and empathy-based approaches, contributing to environmental sustainability. Third, the application of ecofeminist approaches is expected to provide more holistic and sustainable solutions, which can reduce the over-exploitation of natural resources in patriarchal and capitalist systems. These hypotheses are designed to test the effectiveness of ecofeminist principles in strengthening gender equity while improving overall environmental sustainability.

Method

This study applies the literature review method, based on the recommendations of Bowen (2009) and Snyder (2019), by conducting an in-depth analysis of secondary sources related to ecofeminism and the role of women in environmental conservation. These sources include scientific journals, books, and reports from environmental organizations, which are selected based on their relevance and reliability to the research theme. This process includes identifying key themes related

to gender issues and women's contributions to nature conservation, which serve as a critical foundation for understanding gender roles in ecology and conservation. This study also explores various perspectives using literature suggested by George (2008) and Grewal et al. (2016), who emphasize the importance of topic relevance in source selection.

Furthermore, the literature found is evaluated to ensure its suitability to the research focus, following Regmi et al. (2016) and Christou (2023) guidelines. This study also considers the opinions of Cullen and Brennan (2021) and Kozinets and Seraj-Aksit (2024) on the importance of selecting literature that can accommodate various approaches and perspectives. The main objective is to consolidate various views and analyses to provide broader and deeper insights into the issue under study and strengthen the validity and richness of the analysis.

In this study, researchers developed a conceptual framework based on the literature to systematically guide the organization and analysis of data (Sutton & Austin, 2015; Reed et al., 2021). They focused on identifying patterns and trends through the interaction of concepts in the data, looking for relationships that deepen understanding of the dynamics under study (Tenny et al., 2022; Naeem et al., 2023). This analysis allows for developing a comprehensive understanding and formulating logical and detailed conclusions based on structured evidence.

Results and Discussion

Result

Patriarchal Domination and Its Implications for Women

Patriarchy, as a system of domination, has profound implications not only for women's social position but also for the environment. Through the social construction of women and nature in subordinate positions, patriarchy reinforces gender inequality and environmental exploitation. The strict gendered role division enforced by patriarchy leads to the confinement of women to the private sphere while men dominate the public sphere. This division has direct parallels with the way humans manage and exploit nature. This reaffirms the need to understand and address patriarchal values that not only hinder gender equity but are also responsible for ecological destruction, thus fostering an ecofeminist perspective that links women's liberation to the preservation of nature.

Table 1. Patriarchal Domination of Women

No	Results	Description
1	Social Construction of Women and Nature	Women and nature are often constructed in marginalized positions in patriarchal systems, where both are seen as entities that can be exploited or controlled. Both are considered to have no superior position compared to men or other dominant elements in society (Ernanda, 2023; Ozden, 2023).
2	Gender System	Caste The patriarchal system creates a caste division based on gender, where women get a lower, subordinated, and marginalized position. This creates gender injustice that affects various aspects of life (Mosse, 2018; Mal & Saikia, 2024).
3	Division of Roles Based on Gender	Patriarchy dictates that men have a more dominant role and greater control in various aspects of social, economic, political, and psychological life. This limits women to the private sphere, while men play a more significant role in the public sphere (Figueroa et al., 2023; Idrus et al., 2023).
4	Patriarchy and Social Systems	In functional theory, the patriarchal system is likened to the arrangement of body organs where each organ has a specific function. This is adapted in a social system that divides social functions, including gender roles, which leads to a division of space that places men in public spaces and women in private spaces (Ali & Naylor, 2013; Strid & Hearn, 2022).
5	Implications for the Environment	The disadvantaged position of women compared to men is paralleled by how the environment is treated—as an object to be freely exploited. This shows that the exploitation of women and nature is the result of the same patriarchal values and domination (Ottuh, 2020; Mascarenhas et al., 2024).

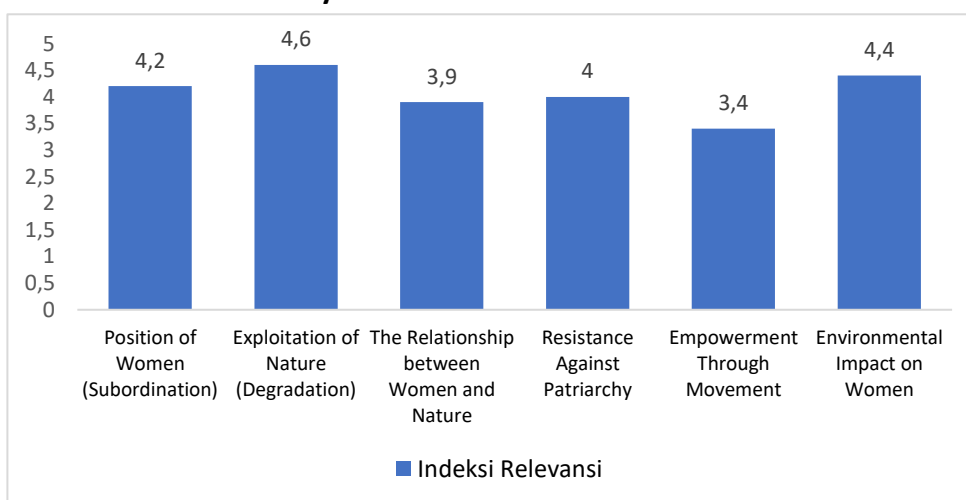
Based on the table above, patriarchal dominance over women is effective in describing how this structure affects women's lives and the environment, but there is still room for improvement.

This analysis could be expanded by exploring women's agency and resistance to patriarchal norms and including a discussion of solutions that have been or could be implemented to address these injustices. Additionally, considering cross-cultural perspectives and integrating contemporary feminist theories such as intersectionality would provide a more dynamic and in-depth understanding. Overall, while this table provides a strong foundation, adding more nuance and diverse perspectives would enrich the discussion on the impacts of patriarchy. These findings highlight how patriarchy not only influences social structures and gender roles but also has broader implications for the environment, demonstrating the close correlation between the oppression of women and nature in the context of ecofeminism.

Relationship between Women and the Environment

This analysis will discuss the deep connections between gender and ecology, often overlooked in more general environmental discussions. Historically, women have often been closely associated with nature and have experienced the direct impacts of environmental degradation. They also tend to lead conservation initiatives. This analysis will explore how patriarchal structures influence these relationships and how women are specifically impacted and contribute to developing solutions to environmental problems.

Table 2. Summary of Interviews on Women and the Environment



Source: taken from researcher interviews 2024

Based on the table, the graph effectively illustrates the deep connection between women and the environment in the context of ecofeminism, showing how patriarchy affects both aspects in parallel. First, the graph highlights the subordination of women under the patriarchal system that limits their capacity and role in society, similar to the way nature is exploited for profit without regard for long-term damage. The second aspect, the exploitation of nature, is illustrated as a direct reflection of the way women are treated—both are exploited without due respect. Next, the graph shows the vital role of women in natural resource management, which is often more sustainable than male-dominated approaches. It emphasizes that women have deep knowledge about environmental conservation despite being often marginalized. The resistance against patriarchy and empowerment through environmental movements shows how women are not just passive recipients of injustice but are also active in finding solutions and leading change. Finally, the graph highlights the direct impact of environmental degradation on women, showing that they often feel the negative consequences of environmental degradation first and harder. This overall graph not only highlights the important role of women in environmental conservation but also shows that the fight against the exploitation of nature cannot be separated from the fight against gender injustice, providing critical insight into the importance of an integrative approach in ecofeminism.

Nature Connectivity and Women: Traditional Roles and Ecological Knowledge

In ecofeminism, women are considered the leading agents in the environmental movement due to their closeness to nature and unique experiences in dealing with ecological injustice. Ecofeminism links the patriarchal domination that oppresses women with the exploitation of nature, suggesting that both phenomena are rooted in the same value system. The following is a summary of findings on the role of women in the environmental movement from an ecofeminist perspective:

Table 3. The Role of Women and Ecological Knowledge

No	Results	Description
1	Women Guardians Nature	as Ecofeminism identifies women as natural links to nature, given their role in managing resources such as water and food. Their local knowledge of ecosystems makes them key to conservation efforts (Gough et al., 2024).
2	Resistance Exploitation	to Women are often at the forefront of the fight against environmentally damaging projects, defending land and water sources from exploitation fueled by patriarchal values (Mathur et al., 2023).
3	Empowerment Through Environmental Action	Initiatives such as the Green Belt Movement highlight not only environmental conservation but also the economic and political empowerment of women, demonstrating that nature conservation and improving the status of women must go hand in hand (Presbey, 2013).
4	Integration of Gender and Ecology	of Ecofeminism emphasizes the importance of a holistic approach that combines gender perspectives with ecological issues, addressing the injustices that result in environmental degradation (Mondal & Majumder, 2019; Liu, 2024).
5	Advocacy for Sustainable Development	for Ecofeminists strive for development that is not only ecologically sustainable but also inclusive and socially just, recognizing that the oppression of women and nature are related problems (Holy et al., 2021; Dong & Kim, 2022).
6	Creating a New Narrative	Ecofeminists seek to change views that view nature and women as resources or subordinates, promoting respect and protection for both entities (Chircop, 2008; Sharnappa, 2016).

The findings in Table 3 illustrate the important role of women in ecofeminist movements, highlighting how they integrate their roles as stewards of nature, activists, and leaders into conservation practices. Their local knowledge of resource management, such as water and food, is recognized but often not supported by adequate resources or power in environmental decision-making. Women are often on the front lines of opposing exploitative projects but face significant risks without adequate support. Initiatives such as the Green Belt Movement demonstrate how nature conservation can be integrated with women's empowerment, but the need for more policy support and widely adopted models remains clear. Integrating gender perspectives into ecology is often hampered by a lack of understanding or acceptance at the policy level.

Furthermore, ecofeminists face significant challenges in changing systems that exploit nature and marginalize women by advocating for development that is not only sustainable but also socially just. Efforts to create new narratives that respect nature and the role of women are essential, but much work is needed to transform these views into the mainstream. This summary highlights the urgent need for greater recognition, support, and integration of gender perspectives in environmental planning and policy, strengthening women's capacity to participate fully in sustainability efforts.

Discussion

Equality and Ecology: Exploring the Impact of Patriarchy on Women and the Environment

In ecofeminist discourse, patriarchal structures are identified as the root of many problems affecting not only women but also the environment. This theory, which has been extensively explained by figures such as Shiva (1989) and Plumwood (1993), shows how patriarchy systematically positions women and nature in subordinate roles, often treated as resources ready

to be exploited (Nirmal, 2020; Woehrl, 2022; Subudhi & Keyoor, 2019). Ecofeminism critiques traditional views that associate women exclusively with motherhood and caregiving, which not only confines them to the domestic sphere but also creates an ideological foundation for the exploitation of nature. This structure allows men to dominate public spaces and make decisions that affect the environment significantly without considering the long-term ecological or social impacts of these actions.

This critique is reinforced by the work of Warren (1994) and Salleh (1991), who highlight how these gender dynamics not only reinforce traditional divisions of labor but also encourage unsustainable practices that are detrimental to the environment. In this context, ecofeminism offers a critical lens that not only focuses on gender inequities but also explores how these inequities are connected to practices of environmental exploitation. By combining social and ecological justice struggles, ecofeminism seeks to advocate for a more holistic and inclusive approach to addressing environmental issues that recognizes and integrates gender perspectives to achieve more equitable and sustainable solutions for all.

Vandana Shiva articulates that the oppression of women and the exploitation of nature are not only parallel but also mutually reinforcing within the context of patriarchal values (Shiva, 1989). These value systems not only prioritize profit and power but also create structures that systematically exploit both women and nature. This perspective challenges the dominant paradigm in environmental policy-making that often ignores women's role and ecological knowledge despite their crucial role in sustainable conservation practices (Merchant, 2006; Gonzalez-Grandon et al., 2024). Gender injustice in the environment is not only about unequal access or recognition but also about how patriarchal systems configure human relationships with nature. Morrison et al.'s (2024) insight asserts that environmental degradation and gender injustice are manifestations of the exact root cause: patriarchal domination. Ecofeminism, then, offers a framework that integrates the struggle for gender justice with advocacy for environmental sustainability, demanding the recognition and empowerment of women as important agents of change.

Val Plumwood (1993) argues that women's empowerment and a holistic approach to ecology can overcome patriarchal domination and reduce the exploitation of nature. Ecofeminism, she argues, explores the relationship between women's oppression and environmental degradation, demanding changes in values and practices in resource management and policy. Furthermore, Warren (2001) and Clark (2012) add that ecofeminism integrates the struggle for gender justice with environmental sustainability, advocating for more just and inclusive development models. This includes valuing women's ecological knowledge, often overlooked, urging transformation in human interactions with nature and the social structures that support these injustices.

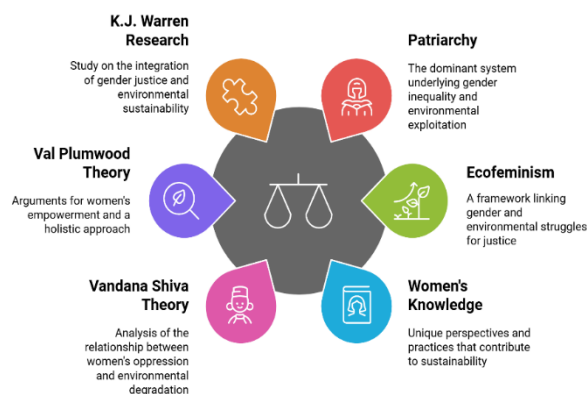


Figure 1. Gender Inequality and Environmental Destruction

Ecofeminism highlights the relationship between gender injustice and environmental degradation, emphasizing the importance of combining the principles of gender justice with

environmental sustainability. The theory reveals how patriarchal structures influence both aspects, which is vital in ecofeminist discussions. To deepen the analysis, it is important to include case studies that illustrate the implementation of ecofeminism in authentic contexts, helping to strengthen the understanding of how the theory can be applied in addressing environmental injustice and degradation. Furthermore, there is a need to recognize and value women's local and traditional knowledge contributing to sustainability. While this presentation is quite clear about ecofeminism, adding information on practical applications and concrete examples would further enrich the understanding and emphasize the importance of an ecofeminist approach in sustainable policies and practices.

The Dynamic Relationship Between Women and the Environment: An Ecofeminist Perspective

Within an ecofeminist framework, the interaction between women and the environment is fluid and interdependent. Ecofeminism, advocated by thinkers such as Shiva (1989) and Plumwood (1993), highlights how women are often identified with nature in many cultures through language and their roles in managing vital resources such as water, land, and forests. Women's active involvement in rural areas, which is directly related to the well-being of their families and communities, is often also an act of resistance to exploitation by dominant patriarchal structures—the same structures that generate the exploitation of nature for economic gain (Ali & Naylor, 2013; Ruslin, 2022).

Ecofeminism sharply critiques patriarchal systems that exploit both women and nature, arguing that both forms of oppression stem from the same patriarchal values that support domination and exploitation (Maine & Bunnell, 2010; Mas'udah, 2023). Women-led movements, such as the Chipko Movement in India and the Green Belt Movement in Kenya, have focused on environmental conservation and promoting social justice and women's empowerment, as discussed by Salleh (1991). In the domestic context, although women are often seen as having only a role in the domestic sphere, they also act as agents of social transformation that promote sustainability and environmental justice (Bennett et al., 2017; Lawless et al., 2020).

Ecofeminists portray women as victims of ecological degradation and as champions of nature conservation (Rynbrandt & Deegan, 2002). Based on their direct experience with environmental issues such as deforestation, pollution, and climate change, women feel the direct impacts of these problems and, as a result, often take the lead in advocating for sustainable practices (Arun & Subbiah, 2020; Johnson, 2022). The association of language that equates women with 'mother earth' reiterates their importance in environmental conservation, analogous to their role in the family and community.



Figure 2. Ecofeminism and Sustainability Cycle

Ecofeminism emphasizes the importance of acknowledging and supporting women's roles in the environmental movement, urging a reevaluation of the social and economic structures that

promote exploitation and domination. This approach aims to create a more just and sustainable world. In Indonesia, women's contributions are important in efforts to preserve mangrove forests and incorporate environmentally friendly technologies, demonstrating how women's involvement in natural resource management significantly contributes to socio-economic progress and ecological sustainability (Anurogo, 2023; Liu, 2024). However, while ecofeminism provides a valuable perspective on the active role of women in environmental conservation, the practical application of this theory necessitates a deep understanding of local conditions, recognition of the challenges women face, and the development of inclusive strategies that account for diversity among women themselves. Acknowledging women as leaders in environmental conservation is a crucial step, but it must be accompanied by sufficient resources and structural support to ensure their participation is effective and sustainable. Hence, there is a need for a more comprehensive approach that integrates gender justice and environmental sustainability to achieve genuinely inclusive solutions with long-term impacts.

The Role of Women in Ecofeminism and Environmental Conservation

Women have played a crucial role as environmental protectors throughout history, often at the forefront of combating environmental degradation (Mathur et al., 2023). In various conservation programs, women safeguard natural resources and play a key role in empowering communities (Unger, 2014). Their active participation in environmental efforts highlights the importance of incorporating gender perspectives in ecology, which supports the development of more inclusive and sustainable policies (Abo-Khalil, 2024). Through their advocacy work, women seek to influence policies that support sustainable development and recognize their critical role. These efforts not only change the way the environment is managed but also support the strengthening of gender equality, ensuring that women's voices are included in discussions and decisions that determine the future of the planet (Lwamba et al., 2022; Filho et al., 2023). The narratives developed by these women pave the way for a more just and sustainable world, affirming them as key stakeholders and strengthening their role in global efforts for environmental sustainability.

The role of women as key agents in environmental movements is emphasized, given their intrinsic connection to nature and direct experience of ecological injustice (Klemmer & McNamara, 2020; Bell et al., 2020; Body, 2024). This concept is based on the ecofeminist theory proposed by Shiva (1989) and Plumwood (1993), which articulates how patriarchal domination of women is closely related to the exploitation of nature, following the same value system that prioritizes profit and power over well-being and sustainability. As natural links to nature, women often manage vital resources such as water and food, which gives them a unique perspective and deep knowledge of local ecosystems, essential for conservation efforts (Agarwal, 2009). They are not only involved in resource management but also actively lead resistance to environmentally damaging projects, as seen in the Chipko movement in India, where women hugged trees to fight deforestation (Shiva, 1989).



Figure 3. Mapping the Role of Women in Environmental Conservation

Ecofeminism also emphasizes the importance of women's empowerment through environmental movements, as seen in the Green Belt Movement, which focuses on tree planting and women's socioeconomic empowerment (Egri, 1997; Luke, 2002). This suggests that environmental sustainability cannot be separated from women's empowerment, emphasizing the importance of incorporating a gender perspective in environmental conservation (Tirosh-Samuelson, 2005; Bauhardt, 2013).

In addition, ecofeminism critiques traditional approaches to ecology that often ignore gender, advocating for a more holistic approach that addresses ecological issues and the social injustices affecting women and other vulnerable groups (Warren, 1994). Through advocacy for sustainability and social justice, ecofeminism seeks to build a just and inclusive model of development that recognizes the relationship between women's oppression and environmental degradation (Salleh, 1991).

Finally, ecofeminists seek to create a new narrative about nature and women, rejecting views that commodify both and promoting respect and protection as interdependent and valuable entities. This marks an ecofeminist call to reconsider our relationship with nature and each other, encouraging a more sustainable and egalitarian world in which gender and the environment are equally valued (Plumwood, 1993). Drawing on these influential views and theories, the above narrative supports the argument for the importance of an ecofeminist perspective in understanding and responding to contemporary ecological and social crises.

Conclusion

This study shows that ecofeminism critiques patriarchal structures that place women and nature in subordinate positions, often targeted for exploitation. This approach integrates gender analysis into ecological studies to promote holistic and inclusive sustainable development, emphasizing the important role of women as agents of change in creating a more just and sustainable world. In ecofeminism, the dynamic relationship between women and the environment underlines their involvement in natural resource management and leadership in environmental conservation. Ecofeminism highlights how patriarchal structures not only exploit women and nature but also position women as victims and key agents in the fight for sustainability and environmental justice while advocating for sustainable policies and integrating gender perspectives into environmental management practices.

The theoretical implications of this study show that ecofeminism provides a critical framework for understanding and responding to the relationship between the patriarchal domination of women and nature. Theoretically, this approach challenges existing power structures by incorporating gender analysis into ecological studies, thus proposing a new paradigm in sustainable development that includes not only environmental aspects but also social justice. In practical terms, this study advocates the importance of involving women in environmental decision-making. Ensuring that environmental conservation policies and practices recognize and leverage women's knowledge and leadership can lead to more inclusive and practical solutions. This shows that women are not simply victims of environmental injustice but also important agents who can drive positive change toward a more sustainable and equitable environment.

Further research is recommended to conduct more in-depth research on the role of gender in environmental policy. This research could focus on developing more specific methodologies to measure the impact of gender-based policies on the success of conservation and sustainability programs. It is also important to explore how interventions specifically designed to empower women can influence natural resource management practices and environmental policies at different levels of government. This further research could include case studies in different countries

to understand different cultural dynamics and how these influence the effectiveness of ecofeminism in environmental policy and practice.

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