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“Nature Is Dope”: Timothy Olson and Athletic Masculinity in Nature

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“Nature Is Dope”: Timothy Olson and Athletic Masculinity in Nature

The emergence of ecofeminism in the last four decades has coincided with the development within critical studies on men and masculinities (CSMM) of various types of conceptual frameworks such as hegemonic masculinity (Connell), inclusive masculinity (Anderson), and hybrid masculinity (Bridges and Pascoe). Ecofeminism, or “*feminist ecocriticism*” (Oppermann 20, emphasis in original), allied with environmental justice ecocriticism (Adamson and Slovic; Sturgeon), has elaborated on the study of oppression by recognizing its intersectionality, and new material ecocriticism and feminisms (Alaimo and Hekman; Iovino and Oppermann) have highlighted how that oppression centers on bodies. However, even though Connell discussed green, environmentalist masculinities already in 1995, and Anderson, Bridges, and Pascoe have since offered critical frameworks for challenging unequal social relations and could thus act as potential allies to the ecofeminist project their contributions are not widely used within that paradigm. While ecofeminism can be seen as an established field within academia, a corresponding field that would study the reasons for the often destructive relationships that some men have to both nature and women has been, until recently, largely nonexistent. To address this lacuna and initiate the development of a theory that would be supportive of the ecopolitical agenda of ecofeminism, Greta Gaard has called for an “ecofeminist rethinking” (“Toward” 226) of hegemonic masculinity which is arguably the root cause of those often destructive relationships that some masculinities have towards nature. Gaard therefore invites new openings in *ecomasculine* theory to counterbalance the “*anti-ecological*” (“Toward” 231, emphasis in original) basis of hegemonic masculinity, and this theoretical gap in feminist ecocriticism is where this specific study intervenes. To countervail the anti-ecological foundation of hegemonic masculinity, this article will, then, examine current theory on

masculinity and nature and, further, relate that theory to a critical case study of the social media profile of American professional mountain runner Timothy Olson. The main argument is that Olson's athletic brand is constructed as a hybridized masculinity that blends aspects of hegemonic and ecological masculinity.

Responding to Gaard's urging for more ecomasculine theory requires a rethinking of male responses to nature. Some responses were outlined already in Mark Allister's edited collection of essays, *Eco-Man* (2004). However, the book is explicitly not focused on bringing forth theory but more on initiating a discussion. In it, Scott Slovic, for example, hopes for more attention to be paid to "positive, healthy male attitudes" exhibited in environmental texts (72). The attributes that Slovic draws on in this regard are "special male virtues" that he argues need to be analyzed in hopes of finding in them "exemplary" (74) traits that could be encouraged in forming ecological male practices. Also in *Eco-Man*, John Tallmadge provides climbing mountains as such a form of a positive male response to nature: he sees mountains as "an arena where manhood could be achieved without violence" (20). Although it is somewhat problematic that nature is here implicitly reduced to an arena where some vague notions of masculinity are to be actualized in, non-violence and appreciation of nature are arguably very much more preferable to their counterpoints, and even Hultman and Pulé in *Ecological Masculinities* designate "climbing a mountain" (242) as one potential practice for men to contemplatively engage with nature.

This article also attends to the distinct dearth of research on the nexus of men, nature, and sport by bringing feminist ecocriticism in dialog with other fields of research. Previous research on mountain and extreme sports, whether it is in sports studies (Mackenzie), sociology (Breivik), psychology (Delle Fave et al.), or masculinity studies (Messner) has largely neglected the

significance of nature to the participants and focused instead on issues such as flow states, competition, risk, and adrenaline (Brymer and Gray). This is understandable in instances that concern indoor extreme sports such as mixed martial arts but surprising when similar exclusion occurs when the object of study concerns outdoor sports practiced in nature. Gender, and masculinities specifically, have been studied in conjunction with mountain sports (Bayers; Robinson; Thorpe) but there are only rare instances (Brymer and Gray; McCarthy; Salovaara; Wörsching) when relationships to nature form the explicit focus of research. This lack may stem from the fact that ecocriticism, the main theoretical framework in studying representations of nature, has historically not been overtly interested in masculinities (not to mention sports) but has instead sought to analyze representations of nature and those representations' gendered aspects based on an ecofeminist hermeneutics.

The case study in this article discusses how Timothy Olson's athlete brand is located as part of a discourse of individuals with troubled, traumatized, and sometimes violent pasts seeking salvation in nature by practicing sports such as mountain climbing, mountain running, and ski mountaineering. When it is men like Olson seeking this salvation, the kinds of pasts they carry with them are commonly associated with protest masculinity, an injurious and exaggerated form of working-class masculinity (Connell). Although Vera Norwood lamented women's exclusion from wilderness leisure activities continuing at least "into the twentieth century" (343), there are also recent examples of women seeking salvation in wild nature, as exemplified by Cheryl Strayed's bestselling memoir *Wild*. However, no equivalent concept of protest *femininity* so far exists.

The material for this case study consists mainly of a selection of Olson's social media posts collected in 2016 as part of ongoing research on male mountain athletes and

representations of their relationships to nature. The main focus is on social media updates made on Facebook and Twitter. Olson's 2016 social media posts are complimented when necessary by some especially pertinent ones from 2015 when they relate to the main argument, as well as by some examples of social media content (blogs, interviews, and YouTube videos) produced in 2014 and 2015 by the mountain running community as well as by some of Timothy Olson's sponsors. Further, some examples of current practices of representation in the mountain sports media are briefly discussed in order to contextualize the case study. Timothy Morton's ideas of masculine performance in "Queer Ecology" (2010) are drawn upon, and throughout the discussion, the case study also employs Paul Pulé's notions of "caring" and "daring" as a useful heuristic. This is done recognizing the fact that any kind of neat division into a dialectic binary is ultimately impossible, and that therefore also drawing on the notion of hybridity is useful.

The article shows how Olson blends aspects of "hard/daring" hegemonic masculinities into a "soft/caring," ecological hybrid masculinity. It should be noted that although the concept of hybridity allows for hybrid genders among other forms of hybridity, in a sporting context, strict binary sex and gender constructs are still in place, and the concept of hybrid masculinity as outlined by Bridges and Pascoe has so far also been mostly confined to a discussion of cis men. In Pulé's usage, then, "caring" refers to cis men "whose masculine identity is dedicated to the greater good of life on Earth" (23) and whose practice supports ecofeminism, and "daring" refers to male behavior characterized by "hubris and hegemony" (17) as well as the "malestream tradition of isolation, competition, aggression and self-aggrandisement that underpin and pervade malestream norms" (27). Although Olson's brand incorporates many "caring" traits, such as an involved and nurturing fatherhood and an appreciation of nature, it also contains "daring" characteristics, such as excessive competitiveness and meat-eating. Therefore, even though the

inclusion of CSMM (critical studies on men and masculinities) viewpoints into the study of men and nature has recently gained some ground (Hultman and Pulé; MacGregor and Seymour; Pulé), the inclusion of an environmental justice perspective is also needed to formulate an ecomasculinity that can build on ecofeminism's foundational work (Gaard *Critical*). Accordingly, when analyzing Olson's athlete brand and discussing its "caring" and "daring" elements, questions of race, class, ability, and diet are also considered, and the (pro)feminist, potential alliance concepts of hegemonic, protest, inclusive, and hybrid masculinities, as well as Val Plumwood's "master model" (Plumwood, *Feminism* 23), used. This article will proceed by discussing Olson's hybrid, ostensibly ecological masculinity and noting where the type of masculinity that he portrays in his social media activities allies with ecomasculine and ecofeminist goals while also noting the many points of friction.

"American Tarzan": Ecology and Hegemony in Constructing Timothy Olson's Masculinity

Timothy Olson is an American professional mountain runner who specializes in running ultra (i.e. longer than a marathon) distances on mountain trails. He is white, 35 years old, and married with two children. Due to his visible social media profile and competitive success in his sport he has received enough sponsorship from multinational companies (such as Adidas, The North Face, Subaru, EPIC/General Mills, etc.) to enable him to practice his sport professionally. Recently, he also participated in a reality TV show called "American Tarzan" on Discovery Channel where he was shown barely clad running through jungle and climbing vines and rocks. Olson is a popular athlete within the mountain running community. His arguably inspiring background as someone who "made it" to a successful affluent life after hard times, his athletic success, good looks, presentable family, and white but tanned and tattooed skin, all contribute to

it and make him into an easily identifiable role model for fans and nonprofessional white, middle-class athletes.

An able white body and physical fitness are integral to Olson's masculinity, and it is important to make visible the privileges that allow white, straight, able-bodied men like Olson to enjoy outdoor recreation and even make it into a successful living. Elizabeth A. Wheeler has discussed how an "able, muscular, young, and male" body is linked to appreciation of mountain nature and "moral superiority" (555). She also points to current societal discourses that define "some [able, often white male] people as closer to nature than others" and thus, through their privileged position more able to achieve "ecological consciousness" (553). Although part of the reason for oppression of both women and nature has been their persistent linkage, a similar linkage of white, able-bodied men being the ones who go into wild nature as a leisure activity and African Americans preferring urban leisure, also exists (Haile; Mills). James Edward Mills calls this "the adventure gap" (95): The gap exists due to historical, ethnic, and, class reasons, and includes African Americans' collective memories of traumatic events in rural and wilderness areas. Although Olson's background places him closer to working class than middle class, his success later in life means that he is accepted as part of the white middle-class American dream of an affluent life with extensive leisure time outdoors.

Olson is thus in many ways an embodiment of hegemonic masculinity. As a concept, hegemonic masculinity outlines a form of (implicitly white) masculinity that is heterosexual, financially successful, controlling, unemotional, psychologically separated from any kind of weakness, and whose central function is to uphold its own hegemonic position and exercise control over all women, all nonhuman nature, and those men who do not conform to its requirements. It thus follows the same "logic of domination" (Warren 128) as Plumwood's

master model. Val Plumwood's master model is not frequently discussed in the CSMM field, but it does provide a way to connect CSMM with ecofeminism, especially considering that hegemonic masculinity relies on the same logic of master and slave where "domination of the sphere of nature by a white, largely male elite" (Plumwood, *Feminism* 23) coincides with the domination of women and most men. Hegemonic masculinity is thus an ideological representation of masculinity that is directly beneficial only to a select minority of men and not something that corresponds with the reality of the majority of men (Connell; Connell and Messerschmidt; Haywood and Mac an Ghail). Hence, it effectively functions as a large-scale system of oppression that encompasses the vast majority of the planet's human population as well as oppressing its nonhuman nature.

Timothy Olson, as a 35-year meat-eating professional athlete can certainly be seen to conform to the specifications of a hegemonic "master male". As Laura Wright asserts, "meat is an essential, primal, and inescapable component of heterosexual masculinity" (*Vegan* 109), and the practice of eating it thus upholds masculine hegemony. To counter this, Plumwood suggests that, for "a critical ecofeminism," it is important to place both men and women as "part of both nature and culture" (35) and in this way contribute to more equitable and "plural" identities (189). Such plural identities would allow "real men" to be something besides "young able-bodied rational productive heterosexual meateaters," as Gaard describes current societal expectations for men wrapped within the master model (*Reproductive* 120). Plumwood elaborated on the master model later in *Environmental Culture* (2002), where she discussed the role of "cultural media and ideals" within the master model in advancing "identification with the rich and successful 10 per cent who are winning" (21). However, as Gaard explains when delineating possible paths towards ecological masculinities, it is necessary to consider the role of

the powerful white males and offer modes of “deconstruction” of master identities for them “to stand with—rather than on top of” those oppressed (*Critical* 161).

Aside from its hegemonic connotations, Olson’s athlete brand also presents a curious hybridity of primitiveness and modernity, of hardness and softness, of a troubled past and a wholesomely branded ecological present. It includes elements such as representations of environmental awareness and respect towards women but also utilizes his often-recounted (Lutz; Olson “My Path”; Olson “The North Face”) backstory of drug use, jail time, and depression. Olson’s athlete brand includes many of the same attributes that masculinities scholars Anshelm and Hultman describe as ecomodern masculinity such as “toughness” mixed with “compassion and care” (92), but its style is such that it does not easily conform to the “modern” elements of ecomodernity: long hair, beard, body hair, extensive nature-themed (trees, animals, etc.) tattooing, and frequently posing shirtless are stylistically closer, for example, to the hairy wild man that mythopoeist Robert Bly argued should serve as the new male archetype, or even an *ecoprimitivist* masculinity. While Olson’s masculinity can be seen as a hybrid between hardness and softness and hegemony and ecology, it nevertheless remains mostly non-binary in terms of sex. In terms of gender, however, the stated appreciation of nature can be seen as a form of hybridity. As Richard Twine has shown, men who show interest in the environment are already, compared to their environmentally oblivious counterparts, “seen as less manly, slightly emasculated” (3). As such, their ontological starting position is implicitly already in a state of hybridity, in ambiguity. This has been a fundamental problem in attempting to interest large numbers of men to be environmentally caring and nurturing: such practices are seen as “soft,” that is, not “cool” by the malestream.

Masculine hybridization may have either positive or negative repercussions to gender equality as well as to the environment. This depends on whether a hybridized masculinity genuinely contributes to equity between men, women, and nature, or whether the hybridization is merely an appropriation of current, socially acceptable norms. Bridges and Pascoe claim that negative forms of hybrid masculinities consist of “identity projects” that appropriate aspects of various marginalized “Others” (246) and thus simultaneously both “reproduce” gender inequalities and “obscure this process” (247). As Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) argue, hegemonic masculinity is constantly shifting and evolving through always conforming to current cultural trends to remain in a position of hegemony. In this attempt, a fluid, hybridized identity may be useful. However, Bridges and Pascoe also recognize that positive forms of hybridity have “incredible potential for change,” and that this potential, if it could be recognized and channeled towards not just “shifts” but instead “challenges” to “systems of power and inequality,” has great transformative promise (256). Since all masculinities are necessarily hybrids in one way or the other, ecomasculine practices, if they are to contribute to ecofeminist goals, should align with the latter type of hybridity.

“Dark Times in My Life”: Protest and Salvation in Nature

Olson’s Twitter account confidently claims that, “[r]unning by the lake always makes everything better” (@timmyolson_run “Running”), and his athlete brand frequently relies on an aesthetic where nature is depicted as a place of healing, where a “man with a past” can reinvent himself. In this representation of masculinity, “Nature is dope” (@timothyallenolson “Nature”), and the supposedly intoxicating, “dope,” effects of immersion in nature can in Olson’s case be seen as a proxy for actual drug use. Wörsching, analyzing the relationships between masculinity,

nature, and outdoor sports, discussed how nature is often in contemporary brand advertising represented as ranging “from the benign to the most dangerously challenging form, expressed in a wide spectrum of ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ aesthetics” and deduced that, ironically, this may be due to the tensions that arise when outdoor sports that implicitly represent “the experience of an unspoiled, natural environment” also contribute to “the erosion of this environment itself” (208). Olson’s social media feed rarely represents nature as a place of hostility and danger or, in Timothy Morton’s words, as “rugged, bleak, masculine Nature” (279), but it inevitably portrays it as a stage where, through arduous physical action, psychological healing may incur. Mei Mei Evans has discussed how “(heterosexual white) men doing battle against Nature ... to claim or reclaim their manhood” (183) works to “re-naturalize” masculine relationships to nature (191). This “re-naturalizing” is then implicitly beyond sexualities, ethnicities, and genders other than those of Olson’s.

Nature is in Olson’s social media profile also represented pastorally as an earthly “paradise” (@timmyolson_run “Back”). Olson is not alone in envisioning nature thus: Representations of male mountain athletes in contemporary mountain sports media often include references to traumatic and disturbed pasts that are at times aligned with trajectories common to protest masculinity. A necessary result of hegemonic masculinity is that the vast majority of masculinities are left outside of it, and Connell names one faction of these “cast-outs” as representing what she terms protest masculinity, that is, an exaggerated, violent, destructive, and working-class hypermasculinity that needs to be channeled into some sort of, often exaggeratedly masculine, activity. Sports sociologist Gunnar Breivik has claimed that extreme sports can function “as an opposition and protest against certain aspects of modern societies” (260) through their appeal to “a ‘l’homme sauvage” that feels discontentment towards modern

society's "security and full control" (263). Previously, Haywood and Mac an Ghail have also connected men's sporting practices to representations of "middle-class protest masculinity" (68), and Messner has suggested that "extreme sports" may in some instances function as a "backlash by white males" (319) who see their dominance as under threat. As such, sports can and should be seen critically when assessing whether their practitioners can contribute to emancipatory projects.

Mountain athletes frequently position themselves in protest against society and have a fondness for presenting themselves as not fully belonging to established society but rather inhabiting its margins. For them, the high mountains represent "the only place[s]" possible to express their allegedly "anarchistic beliefs without fearing the police" (Jornet "Speed"). They may also claim to "choose a different kind of life" (Jornet, *Run* 15) that is "[l]ike a hard drug," (Jornet, *Run* 22) or position themselves as "dirtbag[s]" living in an "emotional/psychic wasteland" where climbing offers the only foreseeable vehicle to attempt to gain some kind of "freedom" (Dorworth). They may even see themselves, and the climbing community in general, as consisting of "misfit athletes" who see some inherent value in voluntary "suffering" (The Enormocast "Episode 64") in their self-stated quest to transcend mundane everyday life.

It is not only the athletes themselves, however, that may wish to present themselves thus and employ nature and "wilderness" as part of this process. The mountain sports media also participates in the romanticization of the countercultural "dirtbag lifestyle". Even accomplished professional climbers may claim to draw inspiration from the Beat Generation-inspired "rucksack revolution" and choose to live outdoors amongst nature "on the fringes of society," do hard drugs, fight with the police, and risk their lives on a regular basis, as in the popular nonfiction climbing film *The Valley Uprising*. Timothy Morton claims, regarding the story of

Christopher McCandless, also known as “Supertramp” and made notorious in Jon Krakauer’s book *Into the Wild* (2007) that McCandless, who died on a self-imposed wilderness retreat that shares similarities with the “renegade” climbers’ voluntary flight to nature, made an attempt at “escaping civilization and its discontents” but only ended up acting out “its death instincts” (280). To Morton, such actions are “suicidal” but, paradoxically, to try such “disappearing into Nature” automatically also means a fantasy of “control and order” and an aspiration to reiterate the “myth of the self-made man” where “love, warmth, vulnerability, and ambiguity” are erased (280). As Richard Dyer has shown, the act of seemingly disappearing into nature may be harnessed to commercial purposes to represent a white male protagonist’s “closeness to nature” (157). However, no matter how clichéd and hackneyed this “escape” into “closeness” with mythical “Nature” with capital N may be seen, it is also frequently and publicly performed by mountain athletes, Olson included, and in that context in fact presented as a way out of a destructive and suicidal lifestyle.

Further examples of masculinities seeking redemption in nature include former soldiers like Gediminas Grinius with diagnosed post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) who have since found peace in mountain running (Altra Running; Powell); or, have attempted re-entry into post-war life through mountaineering since returning from war zones (The Enormocast “Episode 44”); they include famous civilian climbers like Tommy Caldwell who have been kidnapped by “Islamic militants” and had to fight their way to freedom, suffering the “aftershocks” of that experience (Jackson 10). Mountain runners suffering from issues such as depression also regularly and explicitly refer to the comfort gained from practicing their sports in nature (Marion; Shannon), so Olson seeking of healing in nature is not unique but an established discourse within the community.

Nature as a place of salvation for a troubled male is exemplified in the YouTube video produced by Olson's previous sponsor The North Face: "The Road to UTMB® - Timothy Olson" (The North Face). The video shows Olson amidst his preparations to run the ultrarunning race UTMB (Ultra Trail du Mont Blanc) in the French Alps. The video makes use of Olson's backstory of drug abuse and jail time and retells the story as part of The North Face marketing campaign on YouTube preceding the 2014 UTMB. The video shows Olson sitting in a sauna, sweating and looking dejectedly into the camera while through a voiceover he tells the audience of his past: "there were definitely these dark times in my life...taking lots of drugs...pretty close to overdosing." The video then shows how he has symbolically risen from this low life (the perceived mental anguish and sweating in the sauna here works as an allegory to his personal problems and drug withdrawal symptoms) up into the mountains where the narrative proceeds to complete this mini-journey of enlightenment in nature through experiencing its beauty first-hand. Here, nature is represented as a place of escapist beauty where the rugged Alpine mountains work as a backdrop to the brightly clad athlete who in consecutive shots sports the brand's latest collection of apparel while running through lush mid-mountain scenery that consists of flowers and abundant greenery. Olson's narrative voice recounts how "running has been somewhat of a lifesaver to me...running has been just a really healing thing for me," and through the voiceover he tells the viewer that the motivation for mountain running is "to enjoy nature and enjoy that silence inside." Olson's personal problems are thus commodified by using nature as the vehicle for perceived transcendence. In Bourdieuan terms, he has succeeded in "convert[ing] symbolic capital into economic" (Thorpe 195) but to interpret the video as simply yet another example of a "daring" male attitude towards nature would neglect the declared appreciation of nature.

“#wildandfree”: Social Media Constructions of Timothy Olson as Business Man, Family Man, and Omnivore

In Twitter, Olson considers “[e]ach step, a gift from the earth” (@timmyolson_run “Each”). However, Olson’s Twitter account also plays with imagery of the successful business man: for the successful professional running hero, being out in nature is “[j]ust another day at the office” (@timmyolson_run “Just). Pulé, echoing Plumwood’s discussion of the “Man of Property and Business Man” (Plumwood *Environmental*, 32) claims that “heroism” and “material gain” (36) are central to an ethics of daring, and that they contribute to locating some men in “the most powerful of positions ... at the expense of marginalised men, women and Nature” (136). Again, however, the data resists interpreting Olson’s brand exclusively in “daring” terms, especially when Olson repeatedly expresses his unequivocal love for nature and his family: “For me, a lovely day is any day I awake [*sic*] up, set positive intentions, kiss my family and touch the earth” (@timmyolsonrun “For”). Being a family man (for more on fatherhood as a “masculine style,” see Haywood and Mac an Ghail 10) is an important part of Olson’s brand. His family is regularly featured in the commercial material produced in conjunction with him, and his four-day old child was also harnessed as part of the marketing campaign of The North Face on Facebook (with a picture of the four-day old): “Where the mountains at? First words spoken by this 4 day old sporting his The North Face #thermoball monster onesie. It's hard to be 6lbs...and crushing it! Go get em son #neverstopexploring #wildandfree” (@timothyallenolson ”Where”). It can be argued, using Timothy Morton’s terms, that by conflating nature and the nuclear family in such a manner, “[l]oving Nature thus becomes enslaved to masculine heteronormativity” (279). In a similar way, Bruce Erickson has discussed

how “the production of heterosexuality” is implicated in the “fetishizing” (313) of seemingly benign yet often damaging relationships to land.

Olson’s masculinity on social media is also closely allied with an omnivore diet and its inherent hegemonic associations. He is one of the “faces” of the marketing campaign for EPIC Bar, a “protein bar designed as nature intended” (EPIC Bar). In 2014, he appeared in a social media marketing video, “Timothy Olson Is EPIC”, for the product. The video is an almost carnivalesque blending of clichéd elements such as a whistling tune reminiscent of a Sergio Leone Western, Olson chewing on a straw of grass, running shirtless in slow motion with the bison (that are later processed into “natural” food products), cooking for his family, and proclaiming platitudes such as “the land provides us everything that we need” (EPIC Bar). In 2016 when EPIC Bar joined multinational food giant General Mills, Olson did voice his concern on the ethical implications of this; nevertheless, he stayed loyal to his sponsor and stated that he is “still honored to stand by them” (@timothyallenolson ”Big”). When EPIC Bar launched their newest product, a “GLUTEN FREE” protein bar made of “100% GRIZZLY BEAR,” Olson enthusiastically promoted the “Sweet new snack from @EPICbar for your next adventure. #liveepic eatepic #eatthebeardontletthebeareatyou” (@timmyolson_run “Sweet”). Such discordant proclamations of “consuming” wildlife effectively work to reify “toxic/extreme masculinities” (Hultman and Pulé 3) and their connection to masculine meat-eating practices as discussed by Gaard (*Critical*) and Wright (*Vegan*).

Timothy Morton claimed that in “[l]oving Nature” there is “scant space for humor, except perhaps a phobic, hearty kind” (279). Indeed. How are the previous conflicting attitudes and practices to be interpreted, considering that Rogers (2008) and Ourahmoune et al. (2014) showed how eating meat upholds hegemonic masculinity, and Gaard’s discussion of meat animals’

reproductive rights shows factory farming as a horrible, perverse reproduction of “natural” food that “vegetarian ecofeminists” (“Reproductive” 121) must stand against? Is it possible to exhibit a “caring” attitude towards nature and one’s family while at the same time enthusiastically promoting the eating of other families and embracing the “daring” implications of competition and professional “outdoorsmanship”? Olson’s decision to style himself as a meat-eater may be due to vegans being seen as “feminized” because meat is “heavily coded as masculine food” (Wright *Vegan* 31). Wright has also shown how veganism is in the West perceived as “oppositional to and disruptive of a capitalist system” (“Introducing” 727), and Olson’s sponsors would arguably not be pleased with such associations. Wright maintains that despite the proliferation in media of “hegans,” that is, male vegans, being a man who abstains from meat is still considered to be “unnatural” (*Vegan* 108) because “meat is an essential, primal, and inescapable component of heterosexual masculinity” (*Vegan* 109). Curiously, the strong cultural linkage between meat and a “natural” masculinity may even induce Olson to continue to designate himself and his athletic brand as suitable to an omnivore “taste”.

Conclusions

This article set out to discuss one specific case of a purportedly ecological and egalitarian masculinity, which turned out in closer inspection to have many problematic attributes. It also became evident that, for ecomasculine theory to be able to offer anything of value to the efficacy of ecofeminism, it needs to address questions of race, class, and environmental justice. As the case study shows, a practical example of true ecomasculinity is still missing within the mountain sports context at least, and more “caring” attitudes and practices are needed to accompany the fledgling theory. As vegetarian rock climber Alex Honnold has recently shown, it may be

possible for male mountain athletes to at least combine promoting public equality work and an ethical diet (@alexhonnold). Significantly, Karen Warren has discussed outdoor recreation, specifically rock climbing, as a way to commune with nature in a caring, not conquering way. Although Sturgeon explicitly linked rock climbing, at least when practiced by men in ads, to “dominating nature” (29), there are also other, more intimate and ethically viable ways for men to connect with nature while rock climbing (see, e.g. Brymer and Gray; Cohen 19–66). Although CSMM is liable of always “discovering” new *types* of masculinities and not always making the connections to how those types may advance gender and other equalities it may still be relevant to pursue further these new kinds of expressions of masculinity. As two recent works in ecomasculine theory (Hultman and Pulé; MacGregor and Seymour) both stress, it is useful to consider masculinities inclusively as plural instead of singular, and outline a variety of different kinds of exit politics for men.

For Greta Gaard, attributes such as “physical strength” and “competitiveness” (“Toward” 227) are implicated in masculine domination of women and nature. In that light, the examples discussed above, specifically related to the commodification of nature, may certainly be seen in very critical light. The aim of this article was not, however, to focus solely on these negative aspects of masculinities performed in nature. The hybrid masculinity that Olson represents is unquestionably problematic in some of its manifestations. However, as Bridges and Pascoe stated, hybrid masculinities also have “incredible potential for change” (256). It may therefore be worthwhile to investigate further into different hybrid masculinities’ potential to act as alternative, environmentally even slightly more enlightened models of masculinity than, for example, traditional forms of hegemonic masculinity. This should, however, be done being wary of the shifting nature of hegemonic masculinity which tends to always be capable of staying in a

hegemonic position through its ability to change. As an antidote to this, Duncanson offers a “[d]ismantling” of hegemony through replacing stratification and hierarchy with “equality, mutual respect, or empathy” (244). This way, “traditionally disparaged, feminized traits” of masculinity could form new “‘softer’ or hybrid masculinities” (244). This would arguably be congruent with the kind of ecomasculinities that have so far been suggested. Gaard, for example, suggested that being a “gardener” and “eco-activist” and using a “bicycle for transportation” would be viable ways for masculinities to be ecological (“Toward” 236). Hultman’s suggestion of “ecopreneurship” (6) as an example of ecomasculinity, being that it is tied to the exigencies of capitalist modes of production is decidedly more of a hybrid response, yet perhaps also necessary, and further practical ways to deconstruct, modify, and make amends are outlined in Hultman and Pulé’s *Ecological Masculinities*. In short, to dismantle hegemonic masculinity and drive towards more ecologized masculinities, all of the above hybridizations should be included as means to do so.

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