



Greta Thunberg Effect: A case analysis

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Abstract

Climate change is one of the daunting issues faced by the world. Everyone in this world has a role to play and young people are taking actions against this phenomenon through campaigns and strikes protests, inspired by the youth climate change activist Greta Thunberg. Greta Thunberg's simple but powerful words on how adults are not doing enough to address the climate catastrophe have reached millions of people around the world creating an impact on the student communities to start 'Fridays for Future' youth climate strike movements. Greta, who first learned about global warming and climate change at the age of 8 from the documentaries shown at school was more affected by it than any other student, which ultimately led her to fall into depression. Though stigmatized as 'mentally ill' by critics because of Asperger's syndrome, she considered her differences as her superpower to see the climate crisis in black and white and that is reflected in her speeches which have left many politicians speechless. This paper uses a phenomenological approach and applies thematic analysis to understand the feelings and emotions experienced by Greta Thunberg inferred from selected prominent speeches of hers. Three major themes that emerge from Greta's speeches and interviews are emotional, attitudinal, and behavioral aspects. This might give a glimpse of how the phenomenon called climate change is affecting women in general.

Keywords: Greta Thunberg, speeches, climate change, phenomenology

Greta Thunberg Effect: A case analysis

Addressing climate change and its impacts have become one of the most pressing issues in our world. Climate change is more than just changes in the weather. Climate change is defined as changes in the warming of the surface, precipitation and rainfall as well as related differences in the land, atmosphere, water bodies, and

glaciers that can lead to alteration of ecosystem and living and nonliving organisms in it (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [IPCC], 2007). Recent accelerating global warming is largely attributable to human activity. Human influences of climate change include population growth and changing patterns of human consumption across the world. Increase in Carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases have increased due to an increase in the burning of fossil fuels and oils, and clearing of land for the agricultural industry and other human activities (National Aeronautics and Space Administration [NASA], 2020). IPCC's Fifth Assessment Report concluded that more than 95 percent of the human activities over the past 50 years have warmed our planet.

Global changes in the environment are also likely to be correlated with the proliferation of vector-borne diseases (Campbell-Lendrum et al., 2015), casualties, and fatalities due to extreme weather conditions, such as flooding, hurricanes, cyclones and coastal water warming (Alderman et al., 2012) that can also lead to the risk of spread of water-borne infections, thermal injuries resulting from sustained thermal waves (Portier et al., 2010), and reduction in regional crop yields leading to malnutrition (Lloyd et al., 2011).

Yet, extreme weather events that are happening in our environment are often referred to as natural disasters rather than events linking to anthropogenic climate change (Hayes et al., 2018, pp. 1–3) which may create an effective emergency response to the events but fails to create an impact in human beings to make necessary changes in their life that can effectively contribute to the reduction of climate change.

Climate change affects both men and women differently. Since women are progressively inclined to the antagonistic effects of environmental change, they are more specifically vulnerable to climate change. Predominating social disparities and attributed social and economic roles that manifest in contrasts in property rights, access to data, lack of employment and inconsistent access to assets constrain their adaptive competence (Parikh, 2010). Significance of women's role in climate change is mentioned by UNFCCC Former Executive Secretary Christiana Figueres (2014) as follows:

The impact of climate change, such as drought, earthquakes, and other extreme weather events, is disproportionately affecting women. They must be better represented in the decision-making process at all levels as they play a key role in combating climate change. Women's empowerment will be an important factor in meeting the climate challenge.

And today many young women all around the world are at the forefront to retaliate against climate change injustice brought by their older generations. Hilda Nakabuye and Leah Namugerwa from Uganda, Ridhima Pandey from Haridwar, India, and Greta Thunberg from Sweden are few of the names.

2019 is the year when the climate crisis went from the backstage to center stage, from ambient political noise to squarely on the world's agenda, and no person did great to make that manifest happen than Greta Thunberg (Felsenthal, 2019). Greta Tintin Elonara Ernman Thunberg, youth climate activist, and the founder of 'Fridays for Future' movement also called as 'School Strike for Climate' was born on January 3, 2003, at Stockholm, Sweden was raised in an artistic family which consisted of her father Svante Thunberg, an actor, mother Malena Ernman, an opera singer and a younger sister Beata Thunberg, a popular singer in Sweden. Greta's father who is named after Nobel laureate in chemistry, Svante Arrhenius, who made a significant contribution to climate science regarding the effect of differing levels of carbon dioxide concentration in the atmosphere on earth's climate otherwise called "greenhouse effect", is also distinctly related to the scientist.

Greta began her climate activism at the age of 15 in 2018 with literally no support from her family and peers. She considers herself as an introvert and believes that introverts can make their voices heard. Her first woman of inspiration was Rosa Parks, an American activist in the civil rights movement, and found a mutuality with her as Greta believes that they both are introverted and how one person can make a huge difference. Greta with her shy personality and petite figure had very few friends. Thunberg who won a prize in a climate change essay competition conducted by a Swedish newspaper "Svenska Dagbladet" was given the opportunity to attend meetings with an environmental group called 'Fossil Free Dalsland' who was committed to acting against climate change. Inspired from US students who refused to return to school after a fatal gun shooting at Parkland, Florida, Greta decided to skip school on weekdays and sat outside the Swedish Parliament with a large signboard that reads "School Strike for Climate" and demanded to reduce carbon emissions in accordance with the Paris agreement of 2016 until the Swedish elections.

At the age of 8, Greta who first learned about global warming through documentaries shown by the teachers at school about the use of plastics and the death of polar bears was more affected by it than other students. She was in denial about climate changes just like everyone else at first, she says, "I didn't think it was happening, because if there really was an existential crisis, that would threaten our civilization, we wouldn't be focusing on

anything else. That would be our first priority. So I didn't understand how that added up" (Hook, 2019). Greta was so upset and felt her life was meaningless. "Nothing really was happening in my life," she recalls, "I have always been that girl in the back who doesn't say anything. I thought I couldn't make a difference because I was too small" (Watts, 2019) which incidentally pushed her to depression for the next 3 to 4 years, which made her stop eating and talking for many months. Eventually, she was diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome, Obsessive-compulsive disorder, and selective mutism. Thunberg's Asperger's condition which she considered as her superpower made her passionate and determined about reducing the carbon footprint of her family. When parents listened to what she said, that's when she realized she could make a difference in this world which ultimately led to her worldwide climate activism.

This paper analyses one of the TIME's "next-generation leader" Greta Thunberg's feelings and emotions experienced, inferred from selected eminent speeches and interviews through thematic analysis using a phenomenological approach. This might give a glimpse of how the phenomenon called climate change is affecting the women in general. Three major themes emerge from an inductive approach to coding the transcripts.

Discussion

Greta Thunberg's prominent speeches and interviews can be classified into three major themes viz. emotional aspect, attitudinal aspect, and behavioral aspect.

Emotional aspect

Ecofeminism

"It's quite hilarious when the only thing people can do is mock you, or talk about your appearance or personality, as it means they have no argument or nothing else to say" (Haynes, 2019, para. 22).

This is a Twitter response of Greta Thunberg to the various harassment she faced both online and offline. Women, especially women climate activists are often victims of online attacks of sexist remarks and threats of violence. According to Cornell University professor Kate Manne, author of *Down Girl: The logic of misogyny*, attacks faced by women is a display of misogyny by the men, which means an enforcement mechanism that tries to discipline women who challenge the customary patriarchal system. By attacking industrial capitalism and its mechanism, Greta, and other women activists are not only attacking the core beliefs and world views of certain

men but also threatening the masculinity of industrial modernity to the climate skeptics (Anshelm & Hultman, 2014)

Gender roles often define how men and women act concerning the environment. Women are usually predominant in ecological movements and defense of animals (Puleo, 2015). In the area of climate change and environmental problems, the exclusion that Greta Thunberg and other women tackle can be attributed to a political philosophy identified as eco-feminism. According to Mary Mellor, UK academic, ecofeminism is a movement that sees a connection between the exploitation and degradation of the natural world and the subordination and oppression of women (Mellor, 1998). Women and nature were often portrayed as chaotic, unreasonable, and in need of regulation, whereas men were often described as rational, organized, and thus capable of guiding women's and nature's use and development. In particular, this theory discusses how the patriarchal (or male-centered) society treats unjustly both nature and women due to existing gender categories (Miles, 2018) and asserts that the notion of power must be restructured where all life commands its essential value.

Generational Injustice

But an incredibly important thing in that is that those who have caused the climate crisis the most are those who often are going to be the least affected, and the opposite: Those who have contributed to it the least are most likely the ones to be most affected. (Democracy Now, 2019)

The above excerpt of Greta from the interview at Democracy Now conveys the message of generational injustice and feeling of betrayal by the older generations. This feeling might be caused because current emissions leading to the climate crisis will affect the coming generations more than the present generation (Sanson & Burke, 2020). Impact of climate change include extreme weather conditions such as hurricanes and heat waves leading to the destruction of habitats, ensuing threat to endangered species, wildlife, plants and also affecting human physical, mental and social well-being that can disrupt social, economic and environmental sustainability (IPCC, 2007; APA task force report on Psychology and Climate Change, 2009). Greta mentions in her many speeches about anger and sadness felt by her due to the inactions and apathy of adults despite several warnings. Her choice of words is so clear, that she often uses the pronoun 'you' to make listeners realize that it's their responsibility to act "you have stolen my dreams and my childhood with your empty words", "you are failing us. But, young people are starting to understand your betrayal" (Leach, 2019). The fact that feeling of betrayal felt especially by children

due to the neglect and opportunism of adults, is substantiated by Caroline Hickman's interview with one of the teenagers who says, "we saw online that people in Iceland held a funeral for a glacier today, but who is going to do that for us? Don't they see that we will be underwater soon and our country will be gone? No one cares. How can you grieve for ice and ignore us?" (Hickman, 2019).

Emotional Intelligence

Daniel Goleman's emotional intelligence model outlines five major elements or constructs, such as emotional self-awareness, self-regulation, social skill, empathy, and motivation. "It is just a waste of time feeling this way because I can do so much good with my life. I am trying to do that still now" (Watts, 2019). Previously mentioned excerpt from Greta Thunberg on what made her overcome her depression is an illustration of the element of Self-regulation. Thunberg also says, "I have Asperger's syndrome and to me, almost everything is black and white" (Thunberg, 2020, p. 7). Although she resents being criticized for Asperger's condition, she acknowledges and accepts the condition, by considering them as her superpower which indicates high self-awareness in Greta. Despite facing difficulties with social interaction and communication, including an aversion to eye contact and trouble understanding nonverbal cues, she possesses social skills in managing other's emotions to move people in the desired direction which is evident from her speeches and millions of supporters worldwide. Thunberg's element of empathy of recognizing, understanding, and considering other people's feelings and putting herself in other's shoes is emulated in her speech at UN Global Climate Action Summit, New York, "and yet I'm one of the lucky ones. People are suffering. People are dying. Entire ecosystems are collapsing. We are at the beginning of mass extinction" (Gajanan, 2019). Goleman's final component of motivation is also visible in Greta where she motivates herself by finding a sense of meaning in life through climate activism. Just like Greta found meaning in her life through climate change activism, studies have been found that children and teenagers all around the world have joined their hands together for this initiative and followed her footsteps as it lessens climate anxiety and sense of hopelessness, counteract powerlessness and sense of being done to and reduces mental health symptoms (Busby, 2019).

Eco Transference

Greta's empathetic element can also be attributed to Craig Chalquist's version of Terrapsychology (a field of psychology that studies how deeply and intimately our psychological life is involved with our surroundings,

whether human or other than human) that deals with “eco transference,”- the unwitting burden of taking on ecological trauma, whether local or global, as though it were a personal wound when in fact it is much larger than the personal sphere (Chalquist, 2007). Ecotransference felt by Greta is portrayed in her words “you are not mature enough to tell it like it is. Even that burden you leave to your children. But I don’t care about being popular. I care about climate justice and the living planet” (Mesey, 2018). Although climate change is a global phenomenon, Greta’s passion in her words shows how much changes in the environment have triggered emotionally and affected her personally.

Other Emotional Aspects

Anger and despair, and resentment are the other emotions that are reflected through Greta’s words such as “how dare you”, “and if you choose to fail us, I say, we will never forgive you”, “this is a cry for help” (Thunberg, 2020). Research has found that women face more climate distress than men (Searle & Gow, 2010). And for many, resulting emotions are depression, anxiety, sadness, despair, anger, helplessness, hopelessness, frustration, and numbness (Fritze et al., 2008). Greta’s emotions and feelings expressed in her speech and interviews is a rumination of women in general.

“And why should I be studying for a future that soon will be no more when no one is doing anything whatsoever to save that future?” (Watts, 2019). The pessimistic view of the future is reflected in Greta’s words. Research reveals that females tend to be less optimistic and overly pessimistic than men (Dawson, 2017). Women’s inclination to be overly anxious could be the reason why Greta and women, in general, are more pessimistic than men.

Attitudinal Aspect

Taoism

We need to start living within the planetary boundaries, focus on equity, and take a few steps back for the sake of all living species. We need to protect the biosphere, the air, the oceans, the soil, and the forests. (Thunberg, 2020, p. 37).

The above excerpt from Greta Thunberg can be rooted back to a Chinese philosophical tradition called Taoism, also known as Daoism. The flow of nature is the main approach of Daoism and believes that human life that makes sense is those that are in harmony with nature (Xia & Schönfeld, 2011). Environmental conservation

and moving beyond addictive consumerism are the other views of Taoism that are portrayed through Greta's attitude about curtailing climate change

Generativity

“What we do or don't do right now will affect my entire life and the lives of my children and grandchildren. What we do or don't do right now, me and my generation can't undo in the future” (Thunberg, 2019).

Greta's care and concern for the well being for the future generation is highlighted from the above excerpt which she mentioned at TEDx and can be associated with Erik Erikson's concept of generativity in the psychosocial development model, 1950. Generativity is the inclination and willingness to engage in activities that foster the well-being of younger generations as a means of ensuring the species ' long-term survival (Flett, 2018). People with high generativity tend to be resilient and resourceful and are often overrepresented among people who volunteer their time (Son & Wilson, 2011), and this level of commitment to others often gives them a sense of meaning or mattering in their life (Flett, 2018). This attitude is often seen in young climate activists like Greta, although mostly seen in middle-age adults.

Ecocentrism

Erosion of fertile topsoil, deforestation of our great forests, toxic air pollution, loss of insects and wildlife, the acidification of our oceans. These are all disastrous trends being accelerated by a way of life that we, here in our financially fortunate part of the world, see as our right to simply carry on. (Thunberg, 2020, p. 48)

The attitude difference of eco-sensitive people and climate deniers or skeptics can be explained by two philosophical viewpoints called Ecocentrism and Anthropocentrism. People who hold anthropocentric views are human-centered where they visualize themselves as having the highest intrinsic value and every other living and nonliving are there to nurture humanity's existence. They disregard animals and plants unless they provide life necessities which ultimately lead to human exploitation and abuse of the environment (Mackinnon, 2011). This anthropocentric perception could lead to severe ecological crises such as ozone depletion, global warming, and water scarcity. The above excerpt of the speech told by Greta Thunberg at the European Parliament at Strasbourg on 16 April 2019 points out the anthropocentric view of the world. By contrast, Ecocentrism acknowledges a

system of values based on nature and applies the inherent value to all living things independent of their human utility (MacKinnon, 2011). Apart from being the most consuming species of all, the human race is believed to be responsible for all biological life on Earth as they can think and perceive Earth as a whole. Research on gender differences in environmental behaviors shows that women express more pro-environmental attitudes, values and beliefs (McCright & Xiao, 2014) and they are more likely to engage in environmental behaviors in private sphere such as reusing, recycling, and other green activities than men (Hadler, 2013). This could mean that women, in general, are more likely to have an ecocentric viewpoint than men.

Prefigurative Politics

“I ask you to stand on the right side of history. I ask you to pledge to do everything in your power to push your own business or government in line with a 1.5-degree world” (Thunberg, 2020, p. 18).

The above excerpt from Greta shows the prefigurative political stance she took during her speeches. Prefigurative politics is defined as a range of social experiments that both critique the status quo and offer alternatives that instantiate radical social change (Cornish et al., 2016). Greta’s prefigurative demand to the politicians who can bring some change is to cut down the emission level to 1.5 degree celsius as per the Paris agreement and this demand is consistent throughout her climate change activism and speeches.

Behavioral Aspect

Sustainable Behaviour

The interview of Greta Thunberg with Democracy Now revealed that as part of reducing carbon footprint, she practices various pro-environmental behaviors such as putting a stop to flying, using electric cars and trains, becoming vegan, wearing second-hand clothes, growing her vegetable farm and no consuming animal products. This pro-environmental behavior of Greta can be attributed to women in general as studies on environmental action have found that women are more likely to engage in pro-environmental behavior than men (Tranter, 2011)

Flight Shame. According to the International Air Transport Association (IATA), about 2% of the world’s human-induced global carbon emissions are contributed by aviation. Using other modes of transport instead of flying can reduce the carbon footprint of a person to a great extent. Greta Thunberg and her family gave up flights to fight climate change and to urge people around the world to stop flying and utilize other environment-friendly transports. ‘Greta effect’ led to Swedish-born flight shame movements that made people responsible for carbon

footprint due to excessive flying and resulted in a 4 percent decrease in the number of people flying through Swedish airports.

Reuse of clothes. Research has shown that the fashion industry contributes to global carbon emissions to almost 8 percent, which is much more than the aviation and shipping industry combined (Quantis, 2018). Greta's act of reusing clothes not only reduces her part in destroying the environment but also inspires many women of her age to organic and fair fashion. Also today many celebrities like Kate Middleton, Michelle Obama, Emma Watson, Parvathi Thiruvothi are following the footsteps to sustainability through repetitive clothing although under constant public pressure and commitment to dressing otherwise. And this is setting a milestone for the women around the world to discard the notion of fast fashion and focus on sustainability.

Veganism. According to the Vegan Society, veganism is a way of living, that abstains from all forms of exploitation of and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing, or any other purpose. Animal agriculture that requires large amounts of crops and water, accounts for a greater proportion of global greenhouse gas emissions (14 to 18 percent) than all transport. Alternatively, significantly fewer crops and water are needed to sustain a vegan diet, making the transition to veganism one of the effective ways of reducing our impact on the environment (Rohr, 2019). And a study conducted at the University of Oxford found that 73 percent of the carbon footprint from the food can be reduced by following the vegan diet (Poore & Nemecek, 2019). These findings urge people to take a leaf out of Greta's book of sustainability.

Conclusion

Brigham Young once said, "You educate a man, you educate a man. You educate a woman, you educate a generation". Greta Thunberg through her actions has proved that investing in girls and women creates a ripple effect, which brings numerous benefits not only for other women but also for families, communities, and countries. Although there were numerous climate activists before and after Greta Thunberg, no one else could communicate better, the emotions and feelings felt towards this alarm that is climate change and to the people responsible for it. Massive support she has all around the world is due to the fact that everyone, both young and old, feels the same way she does and that is analyzed in this paper. One of the limitations of this research was, primary data couldn't be collected and instead depended solely on secondary data. Though the emotional aspect

was more descriptive of what Greta underwent and how it reflects the experience of other women, the latter attitudinal and behavioral aspects are more prescriptive to sustain the conservation of the environment.

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