

“We like to provoke the ladies” – A qualitative study of climate change skepticism as masculinity expression in Southern Norway

Abstract

This article examines how climate change skepticism (CCS) intersects with sexism and masculinity in Southern Norway. It reveals how CCS can serve as a tactic to reject the perceived feminized and moralizing power of climate attitudes. Drawing on three years of ethnographic fieldwork (2022–2025) and qualitative interviews, this article explores how participants mobilized skepticism as a form of identity work and defense to protect threatened masculinity and justified patriarchal privilege. Using frameworks of system justification and aggrieved entitlement, the research demonstrates how participants framed climate policies as feminized and moralizing threats and used CCS to signal rebelliousness, rationality, and group belonging. CCS thus operated not merely as scientific doubt but as a cultural strategy for maintaining patriarchal privilege. Conducted in Norway, a country celebrated for egalitarian and gender equal values, the findings demonstrate how gendered narratives shaped climate attitudes. By engaging with skeptics who typically distrust researchers, this paper examines how CCS served as a tool for expressing masculinity. Climate communication that is sensitive to identity, avoids gendered framing, and engages masculine norms may reduce defensive resistance and open more inclusive dialogue.

Keywords: climate change skepticism, masculinity, identity, ethnography, Norway

1. Introduction

Adam (student and administrative worker, 25–35 years) points around the office and said, “Us guys are conservative [points to one side of the room with two desks], and the ladies sit over there”. The desks were organized based on the job positions they held, not because of opinions. However, he joked about it and pointed to a line in the middle of the room from where a wall had previously been. The “conservative men” sat on one side of the line, and “the liberal women” on the other. “You see our [the men’s] opinions on the walls here” he laughs and points to the posters and reads some of them out loud. David Goggings: “It’s so easy to be great nowadays because everyone else is weak” and two of Jordan Peterson: “Treat yourself like someone you are responsible for helping” and “it’s like... yeah... if you want to shut down their freedom of speech and use the violence of government to harm them then you are the fascist”. He looks at me and says: “So, then we provoke the ladies a little. We like to provoke”. Adam noted that although the women in the office disliked these posters, he and his boss Daniel, who is also part of this research, kept them regardless. (April 2022)

This encounter mirrored broader themes of resistance, patriarchal masculinity, dominance, and rebellion, and suggested deeper societal tensions between patriarchal masculine identities and egalitarian social norms. Adam explicitly identified himself as conservative and divided the office not only by political stance but also by gender. His remarks and the display of posters underscored gendered identity tensions and a pride in provoking women. His humor and frankness were more

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than workplace banter; they functioned as performative practices that established and reinforced a particular masculine identity that I later found to be pervasive among many participants. In Norway, a country with egalitarian values (Flemmen et al., 2022; Ljunggren, 2017) and grappling with climate contradictions (Boasson & Lahn, 2017; Norgaard, 2011), it offers a particularly interesting backdrop for exploring climate change skepticism (CCS) and masculinity. This empirical paper explores how CCS is not merely a scientific contestation, but an expression of masculinity which can be motivated by justifying patriarchal systems.

2. Climate change skepticism, Norway and masculinity

Research on CCS is characterized by a diversity of approaches, leading to a variety of terminologies that can sometimes create confusion. Scholars have employed different terms to describe the nuances and variations within climate attitudes, reflecting the complexity of the phenomena. It is thus essential to clarify the specific terms and definitions used to capture the distinct aspects of CCS effectively. Climate *denialism* describes arguments that attack climate science (Jylhä et al., 2019; Krange et al., 2019; McCright & Dunlap, 2011), and Stanley Cohen (2013) included explanations of denial not only being a rejection of information, but rather a refusal to transform the information into social action and integrate the knowledge in everyday life (Cohen, 2013). This version of climate denial was used in the influential ethnographic research by Norgaard in a Norwegian town in the beginning of the 2000s (Norgaard, 2011). Climate *obstruction* has become an increasingly used term which refers to deliberately slow down or stop policies that aim to address climate change (Brulle & Roberts, 2024). *Skepticism* tends to create confusion by casting doubt (Almiron & Moreno, 2022), and Van Rensburg (2015) categorized climate change skepticism arguments in a hierarchy, with different critiques focusing on evidence, process, and response (Van Rensburg, 2015) while Rahmstorf (2004) distinguished trend, attribution, and impact skepticism. Impact skepticism, which questioned the severity or consequences of climate change aligns with my findings where the participants' skepticism primarily targets climate action strategies and impacts, typically questioning policy responses and impacts rather than participating in organized obstruction. My participants were generally unconcerned about climate change, and frustrated about what they perceived as an excluding climate debate. An illustrative and typical exchange between two participants, centering on uncertainty, was:

Daniel (25–35 years): [...] and they [climate scientists and politicians] don't think about the positive outcomes with CO2. Like the worst thing is that the ocean rises, it can become a little bit hotter and then maybe we can grow food in more places in the world. But there are a bunch of positive things!

Gaute (25–35 years): They talk about CO2 like it is an environmental toxin.

Daniel: Maybe it is not that dangerous, we can't know for sure.

Gaute: Too much of everything is dangerous.

When I write about CCS in this article, I refer to impact skepticism. This research identified the intersection between skepticism and expressions of masculinity, offering insight into the social dimensions shaping climate perceptions, with a particular focus on masculinity expression. Norway's complex and contradictory context and the empirical material generated made this a compelling case: a society known for gender equality and high levels of education provided a distinctive setting to examine links between CCS and masculinity.

2.1. The Norwegian context

Although perceived as socially and environmentally conscious, Norway grapples with contradictions between its high carbon emissions and self-considered climate innocence, showcasing tensions between environmental justice and privilege (Norgaard, 2011, 2012). Even though Norwegians think of themselves as environmentally conscious, like many other high-income countries, Norway has quite a few climate change skeptics. Wealthier nations like Norway are more likely to exhibit higher CCS due to increased CO₂ emissions per capita and decreased climate vulnerability (Sandvik, 2008; Tranter & Booth, 2015). Although Norway's politics has been characterized by consensus (Krick & Holst, 2019; Ljunggren, 2017), recent years have seen more polarized debates over climate policy (Fjellheim, 2023; Mósesdóttir, 2024; Aasen & Sælen, 2022). Norway's high level of CCS despite its environmental self-image could be understood in light of the influence of the Norwegian oil industry on public narratives.

The Norwegian oil industry's framing of "climate-friendlier" production has shaped policy debates, balancing economic dependency on oil with political aspirations for climate leadership (Boasson & Lahn, 2017; Sæther, 2017). This paradox highlights the significant influence of industry interests on public opinion and policy. Norgaard argued that cultural norms among privileged groups encouraged CCS and avoidance to protect identity (Norgaard, 2011). My research extended this argument by exploring how CCS functioned as an identity expression that rejected perceived feminized and moralizing climate narratives.

Amid Norway's renowned cultural egalitarianism (Flemmen et al., 2022; Ljunggren, 2017; Mangset, 2015) and contradictions in climate advocacy (Boasson & Lahn, 2017), CCS emerged as a fascinating expression of masculinity. Norway is known for gender equality, exemplified by parents receiving 12 months of paid parental leave, with a non-transferable 15-week quota reserved for each parent, every big or medium sized company must have at least 40 % gender balance in their board (Revisorforeningen, 2025), from 2013–2021 Norway had a female prime minister called Erna Solberg from Høyre, the biggest right-wing party (Statsministerens kontor, 2026) and the last 10 years cabinet positions have been relatively evenly distributed between women and men (Bufdir, 2023). Yet, surveys indicated shifts among Norwegian youth, including lower support for gender equality among some

cohorts and gendered differences in attitudes (Egge, 2025; Hystad & Lystad, 2025). These developments suggested a partial departure from traditional consensus-building. Southern Norway, often called by its municipality name Agder, is a region culturally inclined to avoid open conflict, nonetheless, it experienced mobilization around climate issues, making southern Norway a particularly useful site for examining the social dimensions of CCS. Overall, Norway's combination of egalitarian norms, narrative of economic dependence on fossil fuels, and changing political attitudes provided fertile ground for studying CCS as masculinity expression. I was intrigued to explore what CCS could represent. Researchers like Kidder (2018) and Wagner (2024) applied the concept of ideological performance in their studies, demonstrating how conservatives used symbolism and self-presentation (Wagner, 2024) and how participants' discussions about policies were primarily focused on asserting a conservative social identity and shaping a desired life narrative rather than genuinely showcasing preferred policy stances. The conversations around policies served as a means for individuals to establish belonging within a particular social group (Kidder, 2018). To explore how CCS could similarly assert a masculine identity rather than being a scientific climate stand, the following sections demonstrate the connection between climate attitudes and masculinity.

2.2. Masculinity

In recent years, the interplay between gender dynamics and climate concern has gained scholarly attention, including regarding how sexist attitudes influence CCS (Benegal & Holman, 2021). Researchers have proposed that Norwegian men's CCS partly stemmed from defending masculine identities threatened by a shift from fossil fuel reliance (Sælen & Aasen, 2023). Hegemonic masculinity, an idealized form of masculinity with privileged access to power (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), has been linked to the maintenance of patriarchal and capitalist structures. Climate change can reflect patriarchal capitalist systems that concentrates wealth and power rather than distributing it (Stephens, 2024), and patriarchal systems and dominant male power encourage behaviors such as anti-environmentalism, among men (Rome, 2006) or an exaggerated set of traits such as dominance, stoicism, and rationality, often opposing emotionality (Mosher & Tomkins, 1988; Vokey et al., 2013). The masculine Western identity is often linked to reason, while emotions have been coded feminine (Ahmed, 2015). This masculine identity often rejects the feminine as "unmanly" to protect threatened masculinity, and men who perceive threats to their masculine identity sometimes adopt CCS as a defense against shifts in gender dynamics (Remsö et al., 2024; Renström & Bäck, 2024). Such masculine overcompensation can function symbolically to reinforce the social dominance and perceived superiority of masculinity over femininity, rather than merely reflecting biological sex differences (Carian & Sobotka, 2018). Instead of labeling climate change skeptics as merely anti-science or anti-political, climate science can present

a challenge to a masculine identity (Anshelm & Hultman, 2014). This study builds on that and explores how these traits contributed to the persistence of skepticism.

Hegemonic masculinity is the culturally dominant ideal of manhood that legitimates men's collective dominance over women and structures hierarchies among men. It is an idealized, normative pattern of practice, not necessarily the most common form, to justify gendered inequality. It is reproduced and enforced by social actors and institutions to maintain existing social, political, and economic orders (Connell, 2020). When using the term masculinity in this article, I connect it to a form of hegemonic masculine overcompensation involving toughness, emphasizing dominance, avoidance of femininity, and opposing emotionality based on explanations from the participants. These masculine traits not only reinforce gender norms but also play a critical role in upholding existing social hierarchies.

Cross-country research such as that of Remsö et al. (2024) indicates that men in wealthier, gender-equal nations perceive higher costs of climate change mitigation due to potential threats to hegemonic masculinity. They suggested that future research should examine the connection between gender gaps in CCS and gender equality, focusing on the role of threatened masculinity, which this article explores by looking at the role of hegemonic masculinity, with its emphasis on dominance and rationality, in sustaining resistance to pro-climate policies by engaging theoretical frameworks such as system justification (Feygina et al., 2010), and aggrieved entitlement (Kimmel, 2019).

2.3. Aggrieved entitlement and justifying patriarchal systems

As progressive societal shifts aim to realign power dynamics by granting rights to minorities and women some men react with radicalization rooted in feelings of “aggrieved entitlement” (Kimmel, 2019). This refers to a sense of being unfairly deprived of deserved status and benefits that produce resentment and victimhood. This is also connected to relative deprivation which is when you compare yourself to a reference group and feel as though your aspirations are blocked by societal conditions, leading to feelings of discontent (Kimmel, 2019; Manning & Stefanovic, 2024) as a reaction rooted in threatened masculinity. Often, relative deprivation can refer to how people in the middle class feel blocked by people above them on the ladder of mobility. The angry white men Kimmel spoke with in his research, seemed to look downwards instead of upwards on the ladder of mobility. It is not the ladder upwards that was blocked for them, but that the downward pressure from people they have been thought to feel superior, such as minority groups, women, LGBTQ+ and immigrants, were now pushing them downwards into the groups of the marginalized. Instead of focusing on coming up, they want to prevent being pushed down (Kimmel, 2019).

These feelings often arise amid socio-economic insecurities and societal changes such as progressive climate policies and are often misdirected at scapegoating

minorities and women (Manning & Stefanovic, 2024). Relative deprivation and aggrieved entitlement often fuel resentment among those whose social status is threatened by policies that benefit "others" at their expense, leading to polarization and support for ideologies that promise to restore lost status and privileges, similar to Hochschild's findings on the right-wing populists in Louisiana claiming that minorities were taking away what they felt belonged to them (Hochschild, 2016). Thus, these concepts can help explain resistance to climate policies perceived as undermining personal or group interests.

Masculinity intertwining with CCS can be explored through system justification theory which describes the psychological inclination to defend existing social and political systems for perceived stability (Feygina et al., 2010). This motivation appeared in CCS, where defending economic hierarchies aligns with maintaining patriarchal capitalist structures (Jylhä et al., 2016; Norgaard, 2011; Stephens, 2024). Benegal and Holman examined sexist attitudes' role in system justification in shaping CCS and argued that climate change policies represent a threat to gender hierarchy. CCS could thus be used to justify patriarchal systems, intertwining misogyny and political constructs of masculinity (Benegal & Holman, 2021). Other research showed how traditional masculine roles linked to rationality and industrial prosperity fostered resistance to environmental policies in various global contexts (Allen, 2022; Anshelm & Hultman, 2014), mirroring strategies found in research on Alberta's oil cultures, where local responses to Thunberg could be seen as an anxious reaction to perceived threats to colonial and patriarchal land ownership and ideas of gender and the future (Keller, 2021). These political and ideological responses often manifested as anti-feminist, anti-woke (a derogatory way of saying anti-progressive), or anti-environmental stances, with masculinity protection behaviors serving to reinforce traditional gender hierarchies and resist progressive change (Vowles & Hultman, 2021). To explore CCS as masculinity expression and system justification, an ethnographic approach was used, as explained in the following.

3. Methodology

This article is based on ethnographic fieldwork from 2022 to 2025 in Southern Norway. The primary data is from unstructured, in-depth interviews, both individual and group interviews, to explore masculine identity among CCS men. Participants were selected based on their CCS and came from various towns within the same geographic area of Southern Norway. The ethnographic approach and thematic analysis process used for this paper are explained in the following.

3.1. Ethnographic approach

Given the political sensitivity of CCS, the combination of repeated encounters and ethnographic observation supported trust-building. My interpretive stand shaped

four central methodological commitments. First, I explored emic meanings: the study aimed to understand how participants themselves made sense of climate change and masculinity. Second, I adopted a flexible, iterative design typical of ethnography: research questions, sampling decisions, and analytic categories were refined in response to emerging data (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2010; Ormston et al., 2014). Third, I combined interviews with participant observation to access both articulated beliefs and embodied practices that interview talk alone might obscure (Bond et al., 2020; Lamont & Swidler, 2014). Fourth, reflexivity was fundamental: I acknowledge that my positionality and interactions influenced data generation and analysis, and I documented these effects systematically (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2018). Interviews with key participants lasted 1–3.5 hours, typically 2–2.5 hours. I took field notes when possible and adequate. I did not take field notes during conversations if we walked in the park for instance due to it being impractical, or if it was the first encounter with the participants, I usually did not have my notebook as it could create a clearer distinction between researcher and participants. I wanted the participants to feel comfortable, and I adjusted whether I took notes or recorded the conversations depending on what they wanted. Interviews were conducted in Norwegian and translated into English for analysis; I retained colloquial phrasing and slang where relevant to preserve the voice of the participants. The ethnographic approach (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2010) was inspired by Hochschild’s (2016) empathic method to researching someone with a different perspective than yourself and by Clifford’s (2010) emphasis on contextual meaning and thick description.

Table 1: overview over the key participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Age bracket	Occupation	Family status	From
Adam	Male	25–35	Economy, Administration	Single	Agder
Carl	Male	20–25	Student, humanities	Single	Agder
Eskild	Male	75–85	Physicist	Single	Agder
Daniel	Male	25–35	Social sciences, administration	Girlfriend	Eastern Norway
Gaute	Male	25–35	Teacher	Married, kids	Eastern Norway

Source: Own source

The participants were predominantly highly educated, many with a master’s degree or currently doing a master’s, lived in urban parts of Agder, and were not directly employed in carbon-intensive industries. This profile contrasted with prior CCS research that emphasized older men with industry ties (Anshelm & Hultman, 2014). Although participants came from diverse professional backgrounds such as social science, teaching education, humanities, administration, and finance, only one (Eskild) had worked some years in the oil industry. Participants were initially introduced to the study as research on diverse perspectives on climate policy. Starting conversations about road tolls provided a somewhat neutral entry point

since it was a widely discussed climate related policy at the time and allowed engagement without directly confronting skeptical views. By employing snowball sampling, participants vouched for me, enhancing credibility and enabling access to individuals hesitant to discuss their views publicly. Using existing social networks of the participants enriched the data generation process, with group dynamics offering insights (Holstein & Gubrium, 2016; Wilkinson, 2016) linking CCS to gender related attitudes. Establishing trust and credibility was crucial for gaining access and for navigating the field (Evergeti, 2004). Over several encounters with five key participants, their trust increased, revealing intricate narratives that were crucial for deeper insight into participants' values and identity work. Over multiple meetings I saw participants' accounts shift from guarded and provocative to more candid, suggesting that repeated engagement reduced performativity. This positioning enabled analysis that stayed close to participants' lived contexts while contributing to broader literatures on climate attitudes and masculinity. Some participants expressed that they finally had someone to talk to about these topics and voiced frustrations about not being able to discuss this with others. The fact that many had claims I found offensive and provocative, such as sexist views about women and their perceived irrationality and emotionalism, while I identify as a woman, indicates that they did not necessarily try to create an impression of themselves that did not fit with who they were. Some seemed to be intentionally provocative in the first meetings, to test how I would respond. While offensive statements remained after several encounters, the same provocative testing seemed to decrease.

In addition to the five key participants, approximately 50 individuals contributed to the study, ranging in age from their 20s to mid-80s, with the majority in the 25–35 bracket. Most participants were white, native Norwegians of middle socio-economic status with academic education, generally aligned with right-wing populist views but not holding political office. This study focused on non-organized individuals without formal group identities, which provided insights into social networks lacking communal or organizational ties. By avoiding recruitment from political figures or social media comment sections, the study aimed to capture perspectives embedded in local contexts and identity expressions outside formal affiliations.

3.2. Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis provided a systematic, flexible method for identifying and comparing patterns across interviews and field notes (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2021; Bryman, 2008; Ryan & Bernard, 2003). I recorded conversations with consent and kept a field note diary to capture reflexive impressions and emerging analytic ideas. I used a reflexive thematic analysis within a interpretivist frame inspired by Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach to thematic analysis. Analysis proceeded inductively: I coded openly and iteratively over several rounds across four years, moving from initial semantic codes toward latent, interpretive themes. I conducted all coding alone using manual methods (transcripts, field notes, and analytic mem-

os), developing themes through repeated engagement with data and reflection. I engaged in peer debrief and returned repeatedly to participants for follow-up conversations, which helped refine interpretations and preserve participant perspectives. This reflexive, context-sensitive approach prioritized interpretive depth, attention to meaning-making, and the co-constructed nature of findings.

Coding focused on features such as repetitions, metaphors, similarities and differences, transitions, and notable absences (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). I coded iteratively, moving between raw data, analytic memos, and relevant literature to develop and refine conceptual clusters and subthemes. Repetitions both within interviews and across data sources were used as a principal exploration for identifying themes (Bryman, 2008; Saldaña, 2021). Consistent with Clifford's (2010) critique of totalizing representation in ethnography, themes were treated as interpretive and partial rather than as objective statements. The thematic analysis did not aim to quantify codes; instead, the emphasis was on interpretive depth and the situated meaning of patterns. While I identified patterns, similarities, and differences among participants, this qualitative case study does not aim to generalize. Nevertheless, these patterns could be relevant in other contexts and offer insights beyond the immediate scope of the research, such as informing policymakers and communicators seeking to bridge ideological divides and foster more inclusive climate conversations.

Ethical and representational considerations were central throughout the research process: I sought to stay true to participants' viewpoints while being mindful of not legitimizing harmful or radical claims (Tebaldi & Jereza, 2024). Where relevant, I note disagreements between participants, and I anonymized extracts to protect identities. One theme that emerged early and remained analytically salient was the use of CCS as a resource for performing masculine identities. The processes described above — iterative coding, contextualization, and reflexive engagement — led to the development of the gender cluster that formed the focus of this paper.

4. Climate change skepticism as masculine identity expression and resistance

In the analysis, the conversations with the key participants served as the principal empirical evidence; however, quotes from non-key participants, whom I did not meet multiple times, are also incorporated to demonstrate nuances of the data. These non-key participants are identified by their gender ("male") and age bracket.

4.1. Climate change skepticism as resistance against progressive pressure

Participants, like Adam from the example in the beginning of this paper, illustrated how questioning climate narratives could be perceived as embodying anti-woke claims and daring to be politically incorrect. Adam exhibited a "dare to say it as it is" attitude, reflecting a hegemonic masculine and anti-woke stance. He expressed enjoyment in challenging norms and provoking others, yet was wary

of judgment, a contradiction common amongst participants. When asked about stereotypes encountered when discussing climate change, Adam, responded: "If you ask questions, then you are suddenly a racist, man chauvinistic transphobe". Despite discussing climate change and climate policies, Adam's arguments often turned into gender and race, highlighting the entanglement between CCS and broader societal grievances, including sexism, racism, and transphobia. CCS could provide a platform for expressing resistance to progressive societal changes, particularly regarding gender. Adam's 'questions' often challenged progressive norms, embodying a hegemonic masculine, anti-woke stance that appeared to rebel against a perceived feminized society. Adam and Daniel explicitly talked about what they called a "feminization of society", and how the climate debate was "feminized". Such argumentation could be a way to protect threatened masculinity by rejecting a progressive agenda as being unmanly (Remsö et al., 2024; Renström & Bäck, 2024), being provocative to demonstrate masculine overcompensation to symbolically reinforce the social dominance and perceived superiority of masculinity over femininity (Carian & Sobotka, 2018).

Several of the participants believed that those being pro-climate were based on emotions rather than looking at facts. There was a constant claim of a dichotomy between emotions and rationality amongst participants, as demonstrated by this conversation I had with two men in their 60s and 70s:

"There are so many emotions [in the climate debate]. Why is it not allowed to believe something else? [...] the climate people [climate activists, climate friendly politicians and the media] don't have facts, they don't care about facts. When I mention facts and research, they have nothing to say". (male, 60s talking to male 70s)

As noted by Mosher and Thomkins (1988) and Vokey et al. (2013) masculinity can involve opposing emotionality. A typical argument amongst participants was that: "The climate debate is steered by emotions; we use factual facts" (male, 25–35), and "Women are emotional. We [men] are rational" (Daniel) and were thus better equipped in the climate debate as they were not led by emotions. Participants expressed pride in their perceived rationality, using CCS to challenge the 'emotional' climate agenda, seen as crafted by a climate elite and equated with feminine weakness. This emphasizes the normalization of viewing women as emotional and men as rational is in line with tropes of irrational femininity to defend environmental privileges (Vowles & Hultman, 2021). This viewpoint underscored broader concerns among participants regarding women in positions of influence, whom was deemed emotional and irrational, unworthy of power and lacking decision-making abilities. The frequency of how often I heard such claims, initially surprised me, as I am a woman and I would assume that they would be more cautious about expressing such views around me. The "matter of fact" manner which many said this, indicated that this was not necessarily looked upon as a radical viewpoint, but a mainstream statement. Some also told me that "you women

are emotional". Thus, it did not seem to be about them separating me from other women. They were well aware of me being a woman.

Participants expressed pride in perceived rationality (Inge), using skepticism to challenge the 'emotional climate discourse' (Adam), seen as crafted by a climate elite and equated with feminine weakness (Daniel). Gaute was a teacher and expressed frustration over the prevalence of women teachers and the focus on "soft" skills in school, claiming children should learn facts, not empathy. In a conversation with him, Daniel and Adam, he claimed: "You love your mother, but you respect your father", when talking about how kids these days needed more discipline and masculine influence. This mirrors the argument of a feminization of society, and that progressive shifts were associated with weakness and soft skills, including empathy. Pro-climate attitudes were equated with feminine, emotional and weak, and CCS was equated with masculine rationality. Then, CCS could become a way to express masculine identity and show resistance towards the perceived feminization of society. Labelling emotions as feminine and unmanly, and connecting the pro-climate attitudes with being feminine and emotional, can function as a masculine protection behavior serving to reinforce traditional gender hierarchies and resist progressive change and protecting patriarchal privilege (Remsö et al., 2024; Vowles & Hultman, 2021).

Many participants scapegoated minorities and women for frustrations about progressive policies, which seemed to be represented by climate change policies. Claims of progressive pressures were thus used to legitimize CCS attitudes. CCS could operate as a vessel for defending patriarchal hierarchies: participants framed climate policies as threats to gender order, thereby intertwining sexist attitudes with social constructions of masculinity. This pattern aligns with system justification theory, which describes the psychological motivation to defend existing social and political arrangements (Benegal & Holman, 2021; Feygina et al., 2010), linking defense of economic and patriarchal structures to CCS (Jylhä et al., 2016; Norgaard, 2011; Stephens, 2024). Patriarchal systems and dominant male power encouraged hegemonic masculine behaviors, such as anti-environmentalism, which CCS could symbolically endorse (Rome, 2006). By having a binary view of feminine and masculine and connecting these to pro-climate and CCS respectively, these concepts can become intertwined. So much so that expressing one, can mean expressing the other, such as expressing CCS to express anti-progressive stances, like Adam did when claiming he was viewed as a sexist and racist transphobe when he asked questions about climate policies. These views, particularly pronounced among younger participants aged 20–35, shed light on collective anxiety over perceived threats to freedom of speech and hegemonic masculine values. Participants often did not explicitly reflect on the blurriness between CCS and gender or race, underscoring how these issues were intertwined. These narratives indicate CCS reflects resistance to societal changes perceived as threatening masculinity, reinforcing masculine identity

by rejecting what they perceive as "unmanly" feminine aspects (Remsö et al., 2024; Renström & Bäck, 2024). CCS could serve as a platform to express masculinity.

Skepticism represented more than factual conflict; it was an ideological stance against perceived invasions on patriarchal gender roles, resulting in defensive attitudes in the face of threatened masculinity. This mirrors Anshelm and Hultman's suggestion to understand masculine identity formation and how climate science challenges that identity, leading to environmental policy resistance as a means to preserve group identity (Anshelm & Hultman, 2014). An interesting difference between our research is regarding the participants. While they researched older men in the fossil fuel industry and saw CCS as a way to protect an industrial masculinity, my participants were mainly under 35 years old, with different educational backgrounds. Most of them had not worked with the fossil fuel industry, and most either had office jobs or worked with people, such as being teachers. Yet, the influence the Norwegian oil industry has had on the climate narrative in Norway, detaching oil from climate, and making claims of climate friendly oil, and oil dependence, there might not be a surprise that Norwegians who have not worked with the oil industry was still heavily influenced by this narrative. The unique empirical data shows the significant influence of industry interests on public perception and policy, despite the participants not being employed by the oil industry.

4.2. Climate change skepticism as masculinity expression

Participants challenged what they perceived as feminized or moralizing power narratives by claiming hegemonic masculine identities. This pattern was particularly striking given Norway's egalitarian ideals. CCS allowed demonstration of hegemonic masculinity by deviating from feminine traits, such as emotionality by claiming that the pro-climate arguments were filled with emotions, and that they, in contrast, were rational men. Being pro-climate was perceived as weak and feminine and could lead to provocative statements opposing perceived speech limitations imposed by a perceived woke agenda. Consequently, CCS could serve as a tool to restore masculinity, framing pro-climate attitudes and policies as emasculating. This is similar to Kidder (2018) and Wagner's (2024) findings on ideological performance demonstrating how participants discussions about policies were primarily focused on asserting a conservative social identity and shaping a desired life narrative rather than genuinely showcasing preferred policy stances, demonstrating ideological belonging. CCS did not seem to be the goal, but rather a vessel to express masculinity through being politically incorrect and rebellious and protect male privileges threatened by progressive shifts. This desire for domination indicates grievance over perceived loss of power, potentially fueling CCS as individuals struggle with feelings of disempowerment and being judged, like in this quote by Daniel:

If you mean something that is not a part of the dominating [climate] discourse, then you are seen as a bad person by those who consider themselves to be good people [progressive people]. It is very contradictory: "I am a good person, but I judge you immediately!" [laughs]. (Daniel)

Claims of societal feminization were linked to beliefs about feeling forced to be ashamed, with feminism viewed as a tool for indoctrinating shame. Adam articulated this sentiment by saying Norwegians "love to whip ourselves with a whip", claiming that progressive people constantly have a need to feel shame. Participants' definitions of masculinity frequently centered around themes of dominance, asserting control over the climate debate by resisting its perceived feminization and moral undertones, glorifying authority and individual success, and exerting power over territories such as Norwegian boundaries and being able to drive wherever without road tolls (Carl) and historical narratives, such as claiming that the gladiators were Norwegian (Adam) indicating a desire for domination that suggests grievance over perceived loss of power, potentially fueling CCS as individuals struggle with feelings of disempowerment and being judged. Men who feel their masculine identity and privileges is under pressure may embrace CCS as a defense against changing gender roles (Remsö et al., 2024). This can symbolize a sense of threatened masculinity, prompting CCS as a method to reassert dominant masculine norms. This type of reaction can channel socio-economic anxieties toward marginalized communities, including minorities and women. This mirrors the concepts of aggrieved entitlement and relative deprivation where individuals feel unjustly deprived of status and privileges they believe they are entitled to, resulting in resentment (Kimmel, 2019; Manning & Stefanovic, 2024) prompting polarization and supporting ideologies that promise to restore lost privileges.

Similarly to the angry white men Kimmel spoke with in his research, my participants seemed to look downwards instead of upwards on the ladder of mobility. It is not the ladder upwards that was blocked for them, but that the downward pressure from people they have been thought to feel superior, such as minority groups, women, LGBTQ+ and immigrants, were now pushing them downwards into the groups of the marginalized. Instead of focusing on coming up, they want to prevent being pushed down (Kimmel, 2019). Efforts for equality can thus seem like a "reverse discrimination", when feeling that something is being taken away *from* them, when male privilege is unquestioned and feels as though it belongs to you. This is similar of the sentiments of Hochschild's (2016) participants who felt as though someone was cheating in front of them in line in society, and politicians and representatives of a climate elite were helping them do so.

Participants criticized Norwegian society as "too woke" and weakened by perceived feminization, focusing excessively on women, immigrants, and LGBTQ+ communities, mirroring threatened masculinity (Remsö et al., 2024) redirecting their anger towards women, by using CCS claims. The perceived feminization of climate perception was intertwined with broader societal grievances, where CCS was tangled with gender, power dynamics, and identity concerns. Climate related policies were

not only seen as benefiting others, but also as being at the expense of themselves, taking away something that they felt entitled to (Inge, 55–65). Participants, lacking involvement in CCS organizations, had few avenues to express discontent, nor symbols or other explicit identity markers. Using CCS as resistance to societal change could become a tool to "provoke the ladies", as Adam suggested, supporting hegemonic masculine traits like being rebellious, politically incorrect men who speak candidly. The framing of gendered narratives in climate perceptions represented another layer of identity construction, where skepticism intertwined with masculine, rational identities, creating ideological boundaries against woke perspectives.

Changes in gender norms can trigger social distress (Kimmel, 2019) and identity crises along with negative associations with progressive policies and attitudes. CCS can become a vessel to signal identity, in this case, a courageous masculine identity. Masculine overcompensation can then symbolically reinforce social dominance by elevating perceived masculine superiority over femininity (Carian & Sobotka, 2018), upholding gender norms and existing social hierarchies. The findings mirrored claims of Norwegian men's skepticism often functioned to protect threatened masculine identities and associated privileges amid transitions away from fossil-fuel dependence (Krange et al., 2019; Sælen & Aasen, 2023). Initiating arguments with phrases like "everyone knows that...", "every rational person can see that..." and other variants was often used by participants and could serve as a rhetorical technique to establish beliefs as common sense, implying widespread agreement. This narrative strategy legitimizes CCS, aligning beliefs with rationality and common sense to bolster credibility and acceptability of skeptical perspectives.

In Adam's office, the posters were used to demonstrate his pride in challenging norms by being politically incorrect and ignoring others' requests to remove them. This act of rebellious provocation, especially against women, is noteworthy in Norway: one of the world's most egalitarian countries, typically driven by consensus and collaboration (Krick & Holst, 2019; Ljunggren, 2017). Active provocation does represent a "non-typical Norwegian" action, yet there might have been a shift, as demonstrated by the increased polarized debates on climate policies and decreased loyalty to democratic values, including lower support for gender equality (Egge, 2025). Though lacking explicit symbols, participants could signal their masculine identities through ideological alignment, resisting perceived progressive social pressures that threatened hegemonic masculinity, seen as rational and rooted in practicality. This ideological performance (Kidder, 2018; Wagner, 2024) could symbolically mark their opposition to the dominant norms they rejected. This suggested that CCS could operate as a tactic to reject perceived feminizing or moralizing debate and can have implications for crafting climate communication and policies that attend to the intersection of scientific arguments and cultural identity.

4.3. A political barometer

Although the participants in this study were often politically conservative and many times held right-wing-populist views, this raised a further analytic question: do their CCS positions reflect partisan alignment only, or also personal and social identity? I argue that these are not mutually exclusive. Participants were proud of their CCS yet often felt the need to navigate where and with whom they felt comfortable expressing these views. CCS could act as a political barometer: expressions of skepticism could signal readiness to contest narratives and, depending on audience reaction, opened pathways to discussions about gender, race, and sexuality. Second, CCS mediated visibility and risk: participants used humor, and in-group venues to signal affiliation cautiously where overt expression might provoke sanctions. Political talk often constructs group membership and coherent personal narratives rather than simply signaling policy preferences, echoing findings by Kidder (2018) and Wagner (2024). Participants could thus express and find belonging in their skeptical claims, and these informal communities validated identities the participants claimed were missing from broader public perception, also about other topics. Conversations with Adam and Daniel exemplified this, as they voiced concerns over men's issues being overlooked and feared backlash if they openly expressed their opinions. When I asked what would happen if they voiced their opinions on this, Adam laughed and said that they would get death threats at the door. Even though they had to navigate when to speak up about their CCS views, it seemed as though they could “never” talk about their views on gender. Adam’s joking remark about “death threats at the door” symbols both perceived social risk and the performative toughness that such risk helps display. Far from simple policy preferences, such talk constructs a narrative of CCS as masculinity expression to claim status, test boundaries, and secure validation among like-minded others. CCS can thus express masculinity and simultaneously be an indicator of a package of anti-woke opinions. While sexist attitudes might bring “death threats at your door”, claiming uncertainty of climate change and climate related policies might be a less risky way to express an anti-woke opinion, and thus be an indicator of how perceptive the people around are to such views. However, it is important to note that even though the patterns in this study indicate that CCS could be an expression of right-wing populist views, not all skeptics are right-wing populist, nor are all right-wing populists climate change skeptics. There are variations in climate change positions within similar ideologies. Research has proposed that RWP use climate positions as tactics to gain power, treating them as campaign strategies rather than fixed value issues like immigration (Delin, 2023). Studies show that right-wing populist parties like Germany's AfD (Alternative for Germany) and France's RN (The National Rally) adjust their climate stances based on political opportunities (Oswald et al., 2021). This results in a range of climate positions among European right-wing populist parties, from denying climate science to accepting evidence but rejecting mainstream policies (Delin, 2023). This can help explain why even

though right-wing populism and CCS are often connected, there are examples of the opposite, such as ecofascism. This describes how right-wing populist parties can weaponize environmental issues as a racialized tool to blame non-white populations and reinforce white supremacy (see Iossifidis, 2024 and; Moore & Roberts, 2022 for extensive overviews). In Austria, the Freedom Party opposes international climate cooperation while supporting domestic decarbonization, anchoring it in national energy sovereignty (Selk & Kemmerzell, 2022), demonstrating how right-wing populist parties' climate policy attitudes are contextual. The relationship between climate change attitudes and right-wing populism is nuanced and not absolute. The patterns demonstrated in this paper are context specific, and do not aim to generalize, in line with ethnographic goals of not quantifying or totalizing.

5. Discussion

Climate change skepticism (CCS) was not just climate-related but deeply intertwined with masculinity. This article explored the complex relationship between CCS as masculinity expression, revealing CCS as a vessel for asserting hegemonic masculine identities against perceived progressive societal norms. This ethnographic study showed that CCS in Southern Norway is not merely a dispute about evidence but a form of identity work: a culturally embedded practice through which skeptics performed masculinity, created moral boundaries, and reproduced privilege. Drawing on system justification, aggrieved entitlement, and ideological-performance literatures (Feygina, 2021; Fuist, 2014; Kidder, 2018; Kimmel, 2019), the findings indicate that CCS signaled rebelliousness and claimed rationality while framing pro-climate attitudes as feminine, weak, and moralizing — thereby sustaining patriarchal hierarchies even in an egalitarian context (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Norgaard, 2011) in Norway. Participants used skeptical talk and provocative performance to manage threats to masculine status: CCS functioned as masculine overcompensation and a way to reassert dominance (Carian & Sobotka, 2018; Remsö et al., 2024). These dynamics map onto aggrieved entitlement and relative-deprivation processes, whereby perceived loss of status amid socio-economic and cultural change is channeled into symbolic resistance (Kimmel, 2019; Manning & Stefanovic, 2024).

The article demonstrated that CCS could function as an ideological stance rather than a factual debate, serving to challenge perceived feminization and justify existing power structures. Skeptics often presented themselves as rational truth-tellers, contrasting their position with emotionally driven pro-climate attitudes. This emotional-rational dichotomy supports patriarchal hierarchies, with CCS acting as both a system justification tool and an expression of masculinity amid threatened masculinity. Resistance to progressive norms reflected anxiety over shifts challenging patriarchal systems, using CCS to reclaim masculine identity and privileges. The article also highlights how CCS could be intertwined with broader socio-political

narratives, including freedom of speech and societal feminization concerns. This empirical research can enhance our understanding of CCS, emphasizing the importance of considering socio-cultural factors.

Practically, these results imply that fact-based persuasion alone is unlikely to shift CCS where it serves identity and status functions. Communication and policy strategies should engage identity concerns by depoliticizing gendered framings, using credible in-group messengers, and emphasizing universal, non-moralizing benefits (e.g., economic security, local resilience). Climate communication that is sensitive to identity, avoids gendered framing, and engages masculine norms may reduce defensive resistance and open more inclusive dialogue.

Methodologically, combining ethnographic depth with comparative, survey, network, and experimental work could help assess how widespread these repertoires are and which identity-sensitive interventions reduce defensive resistance (Kidder, 2018; Remsö et al., 2024; Wagner, 2024). Treating CCS as both political stance and performative identity links micro conversational repertoires to broader sociological accounts of masculinity, moral evaluations, and system justification — highlighting that climate debates are often struggles over who counts, who speaks, and how social worth is secured. The generalizability of this study is limited, as this is ethnography. However, the richness and depth of the findings can shed light on patterns that might exist in other contexts as well. Future research could focus on similar aspects amongst women, and other contexts to further explore these dynamics and examine the evolving nature of CCS and how similar mechanisms within pro-climate narratives might similarly express identity. Effective communication should focus on universal benefits and depoliticize gendered aspects to foster understanding to develop more effective climate communication and policies that incorporate identities. While I have aimed to be consistent with ethnography, including treating the themes as partial and interpretive, I acknowledge that some of the nuances might get lost in the format of an article.

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