

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

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**Identifying the need to develop eco-sensitive language that is not mutually exclusive to self-care**

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**Abstract**

Language has currency and each word connotes something that is underlying or implied. This article explores the eco-sensitivity in the usage of language in social media platforms and also platforms promoting self-help. It explores how eco-sensitivity may be directly or indirectly bearing on ecocriticism. Words that promote hedonism may be rephrased to create a narrative of eco-sensitivity in literature. The chapter does not undermine self-love or self-care but seeks to foster an environment where self-love is not divorced from the concern for the environment. It aims to find a relationship between eco-sensitive language as complementary to self-care. The chapter is a quest for the golden mean which balances eco-sensitivity and self-love. It seeks the point when these two are not in a state of friction but a point of beginning a discussion on a common platform. The space thus created may offer or unfold some environmental concerns that remain obscured with the concern for the well-being of an individual.  
Keywords: self-care, environment, eco-sensitive, mental health, trends

**Introduction**

With the kaleidoscopic changes in the society, implications are felt in every field. These changes have caused ripple effects in the respective fields and the overall outcome seems to be manifold. A sort of butterfly effect takes place when seemingly small changes lead to multiple effects; direct and incidental (Alexander). For example, when technology advanced, no one would have imagined the connection of technology with mental health. How a teenager in a village in India could be impacted by a technological tool developed somewhere on the other side of the world was unimaginable. Similarly, when the first single-use plastic bottles were manufactured, who would have thought

that its adverse effects along with many other similar practices would have led to gigantic

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environmental concerns? According to World Health Organisation (WHO 2006), around 23% of all deaths and 36% of all deaths about premature mortality are caused due to environmental factors (Wu). Similarly, many other seemingly simple and harmless products like plastic straws also have phenomenal adverse effects on the environment. The point of the discussion above is not only to emphasize the environmental concerns but to steer the focus on another important aspect of a factor that causes this butterfly effect.

Changes in technology and advancement in many fields also brought along several challenges for human beings. Some of them felt

disengaged and disoriented with the fast-changing world outside. With meaningful relationships and deep conversations taking a backseat, ways and therapies were devised to help people out of this mental dilemma. Professional help came to the help of people suffering from mental health issues. The human mind could not respond to or tackle the changes in only positive ways. Such dilemma manifested in different ways. The cases of mind-related ailments went up and so did a corresponding number of experts in the field. Many times, the signs of despair and despondency surfaced although no serious mental ailment was found. Such a situation led to a huge gap between one's aspirations and reality. A huge chunk of the population suffered from the disorientation masqueraded as a feeling of awkwardness. Ways were devised to tackle this predicament. It also led to a rise in the number of books being published for taking care of one's mental health (Long). Experts chalked out therapies and self-indulgence was one of them. Although most articles and books did not encourage mindless self-indulgence and rather gave a caveat or disclaimer that pleasure should not be and necessarily does not have to be expensive, many of the solutions did encourage an individual albeit directly or indirectly, to focus on pleasing oneself. Apart from books advocating self-help, many well-meaning experts also encouraged people to take care of themselves. However, the bigger picture somewhere got a little blurry. Self-care slowly started to become an end in itself heedless of any empathy for the environment around us. A focus on one's self became a panacea for such disorientation. We started using words that created an urgent need to consume.

### **Importance of literature on self-care**

It was advocated that one must focus on the 'today' of things rather than worrying about the future. This focus somehow digressed from the intent and the narrative thus created seemed divorced from the purpose. The intent was to make people introspect. The creation of a narrative, however, indirectly encouraged a

reckless way of leading lives. This may be exemplified with the help of many methods suggested by many experts. Happiness may be increased by resorting to bringing about changes in the outer world and enhancing living conditions. In this pursuit of well-being and happiness, many times people resort to collecting physical comforts over above the material needed for leading their lives comfortably. Economists refer to this kind of buying and consuming as 'hedonomics' (Hsee). This leads to an increase in buying new and at times unnecessary items which may or may not necessarily lead to peace of mind. Such external factors may assure temporary excitement or a feeling of satisfaction but that also fizzles out soon till another cycle of indulgence begins. The topic of the paper is not to quantify the efficacy of such solutions but to explore if sometimes such consumer behavior may lead to a reckless approach to consumption or accumulating stuff. Man is a part of the society as a whole and what impacts the society is ultimately going to impact him and vice versa.

### **Usage of words/phrases promoting hedonia**

The Epicurean philosophy of hedonism is often misinterpreted or misrepresented. This is done because the idea of 'merry-making' has been seen in a very narrow light. The conversation around self-care should be more inward and words or phrases used in social media platforms like 'You Only Live Once' which encourage retail as therapy should be used sparingly and in circumstances where a genuine disorder may need to be addressed. Epicurean maxims like 'Eat, drink, and be merry' should not lead to hoarding or undesired consumption. When he talked about enjoying worldly pleasures, he did not simply mean that one should engage in mindless consumption or engage in activities purely for the sake of sensual pleasure. He differentiated between pleasures undertaken solely for sensual pleasure and intellectual pleasure. The very fact that we indulge in 'bestial' pleasure or 'cultured' pleasure was probably lost somewhere with time (Canavan). Humans ought to exhibit eco-sensitivity in the

use of such words, phrases, or idioms. Therefore, to simply and linearly understand a phrase like this would be unfair not only to the intent of the original quote but also to promote a mindless consumption of resources or a hedonistic lifestyle in the narrow sense of the word.

The whole discussion around sustainability must be woven around language which discerns from the consumption as per need while keeping the focus on mind rather than the other way around. The misinterpretation continues to thrive in the absence of any direction. Also, all the efforts to nourish the mind are mistakenly being fuelled by nourishing the body. The efficacy of any medicine or therapy depends on whether the problem is dealt with or work is done on the periphery. In other words, if the mind is ailing, the cure must aim at the mind and similarly, when the body is ailing, the cure should aim at the body. Although both are interconnected and interdependent simply working on the body to cure the mind may not resolve the problem fully. Sensory gratification and pleasure or bliss of the mind are two things and must be dealt with separately.

Another commonly used phrase is when someone is planning or preparing to build a home for himself. We often hear people remarking *ghar zindagi mein ek hi baar banta hai*. Again, such an assertion coaxes the person to buy all sorts of materials for his home which may or may not be needed. The problem of ‘trends’ further accentuates the problem. For example, ‘wainscoting’ or building ‘9-foot wooden doors’ are two trends that have no apparent rationale. They put more pressure on the resources where the needs are already bursting out of the seams. The interior paneling that covers the lower portion of homes was prevalent in the latter half of the eighteenth century in the United Kingdom (Hutaff). Such ornamentation or accessorization may be reserved for a few heritage homes or hotels or where it is suitable for a particular climate. However, following a particular trend and having that ‘Instagram’ home is certainly not in

the best interest of the environment. It puts more pressure on the resources. Similarly, building higher doors simply for aesthetic appeal is being popularised by architects and similar sites that one visits to check out the latest trends. Unless required for any other reasons, houses may just as well do with doors with slightly smaller heights.

Simply catering to the senses or hedonic morality is not sufficient to meet the whole gamut of human exigencies. However, as mentioned earlier, the concern of this paper is not to undermine or even estimate the efficacy of sensory pleasure for intellectual gratification. However, the discussion aims to segregate the two and also navigate language which is a volatile tool in the hands of users.

### **Is there a golden mean?**

There are no quick fixes or one-size-fits-all approaches to such a challenge. There is a sufficient need to arrive at a golden mean and discourse around language. The Golden Mean, as propounded by Aristotle, is that virtue lies somewhere between the two opposing ends (Choi). Applying this to the exploration of language when using indulgence as a therapy may hold the key to some of the issues. It may not address all the issues but an effort in this direction is incidentally related to dissuading humans from addressing and using self-indulgence to promote well-being. We are indeed all mortal beings but it is also true that others will live beyond us and everyone on this earth deserves and has a right to the resources. Moreover, such a state of semi-conscious being where we indulge only our senses is not the road to happiness. Therefore, such words and phrases may be used sparingly. Overindulgence is not a worthy goal that humanity should strive for.

It is crucial to discuss how the usage of such words plays on the mindset of a person and directs him to actions that may not be in the interest of the biome. When a person feels that within the limited time available for him on

earth, he must expend whatever he can to make the most of the time at his disposal, an urgency is created. It may lead to actions where he is not engaging with the environment in an eco-sensitive manner. This also leads to another epidemic namely hoarding. As he continues to buy and accumulate stuff that he may never use, he gets caught in an unending cycle of buying. Hoarding, as used in this case, is more of a social construct rather than a disorder. The discussion around hoarding here seeks to analyze the cause of such behavior traits. Hoarding in terms of cognitive architecture is not the topic of engagement in this context (Smail). The point here is the 'why' of this need to hoard. One of the reasons is the illusion that with the limited time available at his disposal, man must consume as much as he can. For example, when people indulge in socially undesirable behavior, they quote or misinterpret the Epicurean concept of eating and drinking for they are not sure of a tomorrow. However, covid taught us the other way around. On the one hand, there was one set of people who began hoarding and on the other, the good Samaritans rose to the occasion. Policymakers realised the need for collaboration rather than competition.

Sustainability capacity building was stressed and plans were chalked out to ensure preparedness in case another such situation arises (WHO).

## Conclusion

No doubt that the challenges are humungous, but at any point in time, one should not lose sight of the bigger picture. This may seek to counter the ripple effect of such words, phrases, or statements and help create an eco-responsible society and eco-sensitive language. Epicurus suggested that all good or evil is rooted in sensation (Broome). However, this sensation is not equated with continuity of bliss which should be understood as man seeks eternal pleasure. Pleasure seems to be elusive since the concept of self-care somewhere lost its true meaning on the road to happiness. The research of yesterday or whatever was the

solution yesterday cannot answer the problems of today. The 20<sup>th</sup> century was declared the century of the child by The United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child (Grindheim). However, as we foray well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the solutions of the past need to be revisited. A broader outlook and farsightedness in the usage of language should steer towards making our day-to-day language eco-sensitive.

## Scope for further research

Research in any field must be accompanied by probable solutions. Therefore, the next step in the discussion would be to annex more words to such a narrative. The paper is not meant to undermine the role of self-care or the literature that is available to help people cope in challenging times. It is only a small step and a suggestion to re-invent words or begin a discourse around language that may be used as we navigate our way through the maze of multiple issues.

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