

The Rhetoric of Spirituality, Gender, and the Environment in *The Wicker Man* (1973) and
Midsommar (2019)

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The Wicker Man (1973) and *Midsommar* (2019) are horror films that address dominant ideologies including the patriarchy, anthropocentrism, and Christianity. Both films have a nature-connected cult that sacrifices for the community and performs rituals informed by pagan eco-spirituality. I perform an ecofeminist rhetorical criticism to analyze how, despite these shared themes, spiritual, gender, and environmental messages differ between the two films. In *The Wicker Man*, the audience is invited to sympathize with Neil's character, his Christianity, and his individualistic masculinity as he is sacrificed in the cult's harvest ritual. Alternatively, the main character in *Midsommar*, Dani, gets revenge on her abusive, apathetic boyfriend who is sacrificed, as Neil is, in a fire ritual. The cult in *Midsommar* offers community, connection to nature, gender equality, and shared values against the harsh reality of Dani's former life, fostering ambiguity regarding the cult's villainy and the solace they provide Dani. In analyzing these two films, I argue that they reflect changing perspectives on dominant ideologies as institutions to be valued in *The Wicker Man* and to be questioned in *Midsommar*. This project aims to prompt reflection regarding the media's changing messages around nature, spirituality, and gender over time.

Keywords: spirituality, gender, ecofeminism, film criticism