



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

***WILDERNESS, GENDER, AND IDENTITY IN SELECTED WRITINGS BY
CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN WOMEN***

DAVOOD MOHAMMADI MOGHADAM

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BERILMU BERBAKTI

**WILDERNESS, GENDER, AND IDENTITY IN SELECTED WRITINGS BY
CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN WOMEN**

By

DAVOOD MOHAMMADI MOGHADAM

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, in
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

December 2015

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DEDICATION

Thou my dear dissertation, each word in you is a drop of my blood and each page of you is a piece my flesh. Only the great GOD knows how I suffered hardships to create you. I dedicate you,

To my PARENTS who are the lights in my nights



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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN WOMEN**

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DAVOOD MOHAMMADI MOGHADAM

December 2015

**Chair: Assoc. Prof. Wan Roselezam Wan Yahya, PhD
Faculty: Modern Languages and Communication**

Wilderness has so generally been reckoned a male domain and not the place of women; the moments a woman steps into this masculine sphere her femininity is in question. Hence nature writing studies underestimated women's wilderness writing. Furthermore, studies on human identity paid scant attention to the role of natural environment in defining human identity. To challenge the above insufficiencies in literature, this study investigates the effect of wilderness on the feminine identity of women in three contemporary American women's wilderness writing- *Woodswoman* by Anne LaBastille, *Becoming Odysa* by Jennifer Pharr Davis and *Wild* by Cheryl Strayed. All these three women dare to venture into wilderness without the companion of any man, and have written about their first hand wilderness experiences. This study focuses on the outcomes and characteristics of wilderness as a transformative area for women to know better their physical and spiritual "self." Ecocriticism offers the requisite foundation for the current study since this approach speaks about human/nature relationship and apt for reading non-fiction nature writings. Because this ecocritical study concentrates on the redefinition of identity through a close experience of pure natural environment in wilderness, Susan Clayton's theory of environmental identity is mainly utilized in this research. Other concepts like 'wilderness rites of passage' and 'forms of identity construction' are borrowed from other scholars like Foster & Little and Castells to strengthen the conceptual framework. The studies on the effects of wilderness on human, done in the field of psychology, also play an important role in our conceptual framework. The study concludes that being faraway from society and its socio-cultural norms, wilderness offers a context entirely different from social one for the women in the current study. Although in different ways, all these women feel themselves competent and autonomous at the end of their wilderness journey. The main gift that a wilderness journey bestows on these women is their empowered sense of connection and their change in perspective on the notion of feminine body and feminine appearance/beauty albeit in different ways. Accordingly, they are able to challenge the traditional femininity prescribed for them and to reach a sense of self-actualization, hence to reconstruct a new feminine identity.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

RIMBA, GENDER, DAN IDENTITI DALAM KARYA TERPILIH WANITA AMERIKA MUTAKHIR

Oleh

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Secara amnya rimba telah dianggap sebagai domain kaum lelaki dan bukan tempat untuk kaum wanita; lantas apabila seseorang wanita menjejakkan kaki di alam maskulin, kewanitaannya dipersoalkan. Justeru, kajian terhadap penulisan tentang alam meremehkan karya rimba oleh wanita. Malah, kajian tentang identiti manusia kurang memberikan tumpuan terhadap peranan alam semula jadi dalam menentukan identiti manusia. Untuk mencabar kelangkaan ini dalam kesusasteraan, maka kajian ini meneliti kesan rimba terhadap identiti feminin wanita dalam tiga karya rimba wanita Amerika kontemporari, iaitu *Woodswoman* oleh Anne LaBastille, *Becoming Odyssa* oleh Jennifer Davis, dan *Wild* oleh Cheryl Strayed. Ketiga-tiga wanita ini sanggup mengembara sendirian di dalam rimba tanpa ditemani oleh orang lain, dan telah menulis pengalaman di dalam rimba yang diperolehi secara langsung oleh mereka. Kajian ini memberikan tumpuan pada hasil pengalaman dan ciri rimba sebagai ranah transformatif bagi wanita untuk mengetahui fizikal dan rohani "diri" mereka dengan lebih mendalam. Ekokritisisme menawarkan asas yang diperlukan untuk kajian semasa ini kerana pendekatan ini memperkatakan hubungan antara manusia dengan alam, dan sesuai untuk pembacaan karya bukan fiksi tentang alam. Oleh sebab kajian ekokritikal ini tertumpu pada pendefinisian semula identiti melalui pengalaman langsung tentang alam sekitar semula jadi yang tulen di dalam rimba, sebahagian besar teori identiti alam sekitar Susan Clayton digunakan dalam kajian ini. Konsep lain seperti 'upacara laluan rimba' dan 'bentuk pembinaan identiti' dipinjam daripada sarjana lain, seperti Foster & Little dan Castells untuk mengukuhkan kerangka konsep kajian ini. Kajian tentang kesan rimba pada manusia yang dilakukan dalam bidang psikologi juga memainkan peranan yang penting dalam kerangka konsep kami. Kajian ini menyimpulkan bahawa dengan memencilkan diri daripada masyarakat dan norma sosiobudaya, rimba menyogokkan sekitaran yang sama sekali berbeza daripada sosial wanita dalam kajian semasa ini. Walaupun dengan cara yang berbeza, semua wanita berasa diri mereka berkemahiran dan berautonomi pada akhir pengembaraan rimba mereka. Hadiah utama yang diperolehi wanita-wanita ini daripada pengembaraan rimba mereka ialah pemerksaan deria perhubungan dan perubahan perspektif mereka tentang tanggapan terhadap jasad feminin serta penampilan atau kecantikan feminin walaupun dalam cara yang berbeza. Oleh itu, mereka mampu mencabar kewanitaan tradisional yang ditetapkan untuk mereka dan mampu menyedari hakikat diri sendiri, justeru membina semula identiti feminin baharu.

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This research is a culmination of my deep love for the natural world and especially wilderness. Through this study I tried to make the readers aware about the therapeutic power of our first home: the natural environment. A home with a floor as majestic as meadows, decorations as glorious as mountains, and a roof as sublime as heaven. There are no walls, no limitations, hence full with the scent of freedom. We are neither a guest nor the owner, we are a part of it; there is the place where we can find the whole meaning of our existence. Nature can wash our masks by a pure water of self-knowledge.

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I like to express a great feeling of love for Malaysia and especially its Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication at UPM. I love the kindness and happiness of all the staffs and lecturers there, especially my lovely Mr. Rohimmi Bin Noor. I pray that dear GOD keeps this happiness and peace in this land forever.

I certify that a Thesis Examination Committee has met on 9 December 2015 to conduct the final examination of Davood Mohammadi Moghadam on his thesis entitled “Wilderness, Gender, and Identity in Selected Writings by Contemporary American Women” in accordance with the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 and the Constitution of the Universiti Putra Malaysia [P.U.(A) 106] 15 March 1998. The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the the Ph.D in English Literature.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Wilderness has always been a place of psychological well-being, empowerment, reduction of stress, and most important of all, a place of transformation. One of the salient benefits of wilderness, as a pure and untouched natural environment, is its positive effect on the human identity. Clayton, through her study on the relevance of the human identity to the natural environment believes that the natural environment can “affect the ways in which people think about themselves” (46). So wilderness as the purest form of natural environment can play an important role in defining personal identity.

Despite the widely recognized benefits of wilderness for a human’s sense of self and psychological well-being, taking benefit from such a beneficial power varies with regard to gender (LaBastille 1980), (Nash 1982), (Kolodny 1984), (Bialeschki 1992). Wilderness adventures and its advantages have been historically, a masculine occupation. In real-life and also in literature, it is the men who go out and conquer wilderness, leaving women to tend their domestic chores (Cole et al 1994), (Greiner 1993). A review of literature on nature writings or wilderness narratives clearly shows that women were not only excluded from wilderness, but their work pertaining to wilderness narratives was also underestimated. This underestimation comes from the belief that women are, biologically unqualified for wilderness. Even in our daily life, we witness how people look at women who undertake wilderness adventures.

It was only in the late twentieth century, through the writings of Mary Austin, that women gave a voice to wilderness. In recent times, there has been an upsurge of contemporary women writers tackling issues on wilderness. They have challenged their own femininity and broken the traditional mould to embrace wilderness, and write about their experiences. They challenge the stereotypical norms and gender roles upon which women have been confined.

The unique quality of wilderness would help women to be separated from their predefined traditional femininity and to reconstruct a new femininity based on how they recognize themselves in a wilderness context, devoid of social restrictions. One of the characteristics of wilderness is in being “uncontaminated” or uncontrolled by civilization (Garrard 59). Hence there are no culturally constructed norms that restrict or dictate how a woman should act or conduct herself. In such a context women would know themselves as they really are and like to be, because according to LaBastille, wilderness is the only place where there are no “barriers” and women can be equal to men (Women and Wilderness 154). In contrast to a social context, women in wilderness may perceive themselves as capable and realize their real physical abilities (Fredrickson and Anderson 33).

Angell, in her case study on women believes that during a solo wilderness experience, women can move beyond their self-imposed limitations (85). They can even move beyond social and cultural limitations. Wilderness is a well prepared ground for them to challenge the traditionally predefined femininity. A review of literature on the benefits of wilderness proves that wilderness is an ideal testing ground for women to push their limits and challenge their predefined femininity because wilderness adventures, due to its harsh challenges, has been a masculine occupation and not feminine (LaBastille 1980), (Nash 1982), (Kolodny 1984), (Bialeschki 1992). While women have traditionally been excluded from wilderness, those who get to experience a wilderness adventure may find themselves resisting constraints and limitations, which may then redefine their femininity. Therefore, in wilderness women would change their self-concept and find themselves empowered: they may then attain real knowledge of self or self-actualization.

The purpose of this study is to do a close reading of wilderness writings by selected contemporary American women who had experienced solo wilderness adventures first hand. This study will examine whether the wilderness had influenced their sense of self, and how it has affected them. This study will try to show the process through which these women attained a real sense of self, or self-actualization, through a close experience of wilderness.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Humans have long had a close connection with nature; the human to nature relationship is more important when considering human's existence; Searles states that the nonhuman environment "constitutes one of the most basically important ingredients of human psychological existence" (5). The power of nature as a psychological healer for human is factual; "poets, writers, philosophers, and artists have long held that natural settings are good for body, mind, and soul." (Hartig, Mang, and Evans 3). Ulrich also believes that "nature has a calming effect because it is a nontaxing stimulus that elicits positively toned emotional states and blocks negatively toned feelings" (Hartig, Mang, and Evans 6). Kaplan and Kaplan when discussing "the benefits that people experience in nature," confirm that the natural settings "permit people to move about and to explore with comfort and confidence" and also "foster the recovery from mental fatigue. They permit tired individuals to regain effective functioning" (196).

When speaking about the natural environment one should notice that there are different kinds of natural environment. Wilderness, as the purest form of nature, is the core of the current study. Not all natural environments deserve to be called 'wilderness'. While all other kinds of nature have been controlled and manipulated by civilization, the most salient quality of wilderness is that which calls it untainted and untamed by the power of civilization; Greg Garrard explains that "the idea of wilderness, signifying nature in a state uncontaminated by civilization" (59).

Therefore, wilderness is uncontrolled and untouched by civilization, it has a wild nature and is far away from urban populations; as Algarotti believes "wilderness is defined by its separation and distinction from spaces intended for human habitation" (2). Hence

the second most important quality of wilderness is that it has a pure untouched nature; pristine. It is not the place of human habitation.

The most accepted definition of wilderness is the one provided by Wilderness Act (1964): “A wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his own works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain” (Howard 16). This definition, on which the current study is based, supports the argument that human has the least power in wilderness. Persons who go into wilderness may be entirely transformed by its power. Forays into the wilderness can be a ‘rites of passage’ as proven by scholars like Foster and Little.

As mentioned earlier, wilderness is a region uncontrolled by civilization and uninhabited by human. The pure, untouched nature of wilderness yields its strongest influence on human. It is the place where a human relies on his/her own strengths and abilities to survive; it is a place fraught with unforeseen danger that could put one’s life in peril. Venturing into the wilderness requires psychical and physical strength and grit qualities traditionally attributed to males. Hence, by virtue of this, women were disqualified from wilderness adventures. Wilderness has always been a male domain, where men seek to prove their manhood and define a masculine identity; therefore, wilderness adventure has been always, a masculine occupation and not feminine; according to Warren “the moment she steps into woods, her femininity is in question” (“Women’s Outdoor Adventures” 11). Thus, women have been excluded from wilderness simply because it is considered dangerous and unsuitable for women.

The exclusion of women from wilderness is also reflected in literature; the belief that wilderness is a male domain, strongly influenced nature writings or wilderness narratives. For example, Thoreau who was one the most prominent nature writers, gendered nature as female, but “describe[s] walking in wilderness as a youthful, masculine occupation.” The Romantics had also gendered wilderness as female, yet “considered wilderness a space for the enrichment of men, not women” (Sperry 8-9). Piekarski clearly elucidates the matter: “For all too long, the history of the vast land west of the Mississippi River and the literature inspired by that land have been considered men’s domain. It is generally believed that women not only do not read Western fiction but that they do not write it” (1).

The belief that wilderness is a male domain is especially emphasized in the literature of America. The salient features of wilderness and its quest is a much emphasized motif in American literature. Shannon Pufahl confirms that, “The journey into the wilderness has long been a defining theme of American literature” (5). However Pagano elucidates that: “In American literature men go to the wilderness to get away from women... Triumph in the wilderness redeems the individual masculine soul” (xx). The belief is so harsh that according to Greiner, American novels conform to a rigid view of women: “If females dare to enter the wilderness, as does Cooper’s Cora, they are either killed in the dark forest or returned to the tame settlement,” because wilderness quest is a “male prerogative” (120).

American literature is replete with male protagonists who seek to prove their masculinity in the wilderness. Except the nature writers like Emerson, Leopold, Thoreau, Muir, Abbey and others who write of their own experiences, male fiction writers such as Cooper, Melville, Twain, Hemingway, Faulkner, and Dickey also followed similar themes which Greiner elucidates: “Males in American literature first bond and then cross the border between society and the wilderness in order to quest toward the freedom of adventure by leaving females behind” (2). Reising also believes that the first important similarity between Emerson, Thoreau and Melville is their belief that “the entry into and examination of nature is, virtually without exception, the right and responsibility of males.” He explains that in their writings, the wilderness worlds “are populated exclusively by men” (211).

It was only in the late twentieth century, after Mary Austin’s desert quest that more women were seen venturing into wilderness than previously. Shelley Sperry mentions that, “Mary Austin’s feminist critique of the frontier narrative exposed the links between exploitation of wild nature and exploitation of women by men” (Abstract). Garrard also explains that Barney Nelson’s book “shows how Austin challenges the myth that wilderness is no place for a woman, rewriting the gendered dichotomy of masculine wilderness and feminine domesticity” (76-77). Therefore, it was only in the late twentieth century that women writers started to write more seriously on wilderness. They tried to emulate Mary Austin’s quest and break away from the long held tradition of wilderness being a male domain.

Thus, women’s voice in the genre of nature writing, especially wilderness writing, is completely recent. The genre has always been filled with men’s adventures on wilderness, while women have been restricted to domestic areas; according to Greiner: “In traditional American literature the hero reconnoiters new territory while the heroine reclaims old space” (22).

But the fact remains that although women have entered the field, yet their wilderness writings have not been taken seriously. A survey on nature writings in a bookstore or at a library leads us to the books often written by male writers; Piekarski confirms that men’s “books continue to fill the Western sections of bookstores” (1). Even a look at the roster of the anthologies of nature writings will prove that: “Women are poorly represented in the Western anthologies that are used in classrooms to survey the genre. A number of anthologies do not include women writers at all” (Piekarski 1-2).

Nature writing studies too, paid scant attention or underestimated women’s literary narratives on nature, and especially their wilderness writings; “Critical works that have examined the history of Western literature have tended to bypass women writers” (Piekarski 3). Anderson in her famous book *Sisters of the Earth* claims that nature writing studies are usually focused on “Aldo Leopold, Robinson Jeffers, Edward Abbey, and Wallace Stegner,” and also courses on “American Wilderness” are filled with “Hawthorne, Emerson, Irving, Whitman, Thoreau, Muir, Leopold, and Abbey”; therefore, she asks, “Where were the women’s voices?” (1).

Thus, despite their prolific narratives on wilderness, women's writings on this subject have been underestimated simply because the attention of scholars has been mostly focused on male wilderness writings. Hence women have not only been physically excluded from wilderness, but their wilderness writings have also been excluded from studies on wilderness. Studies on nature writings and especially wilderness narratives by women, have not been given adequate focus, and this seems to be an ever widening discrepancy and gap with contemporary women writers. Therefore, in order to correct this anomaly, the current study tries to include the voices of women in wilderness, especially those who dared to venture into masculine territory and write about their firsthand wilderness experiences.

Furthermore, according to what was discussed earlier, it is a highly accepted fact that people in the pure natural areas like wilderness, would experience meaningful changes; these changes mostly refer to the power of nature as a psychological healer. Garrard believes "[wilderness] is seen as a place for the reinvigoration of those tired of the moral and material pollution of city." This opportunity is more salient in the case of wilderness which has a positive effect on the human body, spirit and psyche. Sperry confirms the uniqueness of wilderness: "In wilderness men and women tested themselves and their hopes for the future in places they thought were more genuine and more forgiving than their urban homes" (1).

One of the greatest psychological effects of wilderness is its effect on human's sense of self. According to Tuner, wilderness causes a "process of increasing self-reference and self-measurement" (qtd in Nesami 45). Its pure natural environment makes it a unique place of "transformation" for human (Arnold 51). Holman and McAvoy also confirm that wilderness is "a privileging context for the discovery of self" (170). Thus, wilderness provides a unique opportunity for human to discover his/her real self.

In literature as in real life, wilderness has been the place of transformation, especially of identity. According to Garrard "Wilderness narratives" include the motif of "scape and return" (59). However, based on a review of literature, scholars are recently encouraged to explore the relationship between human identity and natural environment. A recent field that has only just been explored in the 21st century, studies on the relationship between human identity and natural environment are few. Clayton confirms: "To date, environmental scholarship has given insufficient consideration to the deep connection between identity and the natural environment" (3).

This insufficiency is evident in the field of literature since identity in literature is mostly investigated in a social context. Clayton surmises that psychologists often "overlook" the effects of the natural environment on the human identity (45). Accordingly, although a review of literature on wilderness highlights its well-known psychological and physical effects on humans, ecocritical studies on the effects of wilderness on the human identity are rare in literature. According to Nesami: "The issue of identity and nature is not adequately investigated in literature... there is still insufficient data focusing on the identity and self from ecocritical perspective - the analysis of how nature contributes to define human to himself" (40).

Therefore, while it was mentioned earlier that women's wilderness writings are underestimated and it's a gap in studies on wilderness writings, the second gap which this study tries to uncover, is the inadequacy of studies on the relationship between human identity and the natural environment. Though ecocritical studies on the relevance of redefinition of identity to natural environment are rare, much rarer are studies on redefinition of women's identities through a close experience with the pure natural environment of wilderness. Susan Schoelwer declares that in American literature, "the myth of the frontier remains tenaciously centered on male subjects and activities... [so] women and feminine themes are... unnoted in much frontier imagery" (Abstract).

Therefore, the field of redefinition of feminine identity in a wilderness context can be claimed to be vacant among the rare studies on women's wilderness writings, especially in the case of contemporary women. Hence, blending the two above gaps, the main gap in literature which this study tries to uncover is the redefinition of femininity in a wilderness context. By studying some selected contemporary women's wilderness writing, this study attempts to show how these contemporary women redefined their femininity in a natural context. This study will also attempt to show that wilderness proved to be a testing ground for these women to attain self-actualization and challenge predefined social and traditional roles of femininity. By doing so, these women were able to feel what it really means to be a woman.

Accordingly, this study will discuss how contemporary women deal with their constraints in wilderness and how their femininity is reconstructed through their close experience with wilderness. Does their gender influence the way they confront wilderness? Does the wilderness challenge their traditional femininity and lead them to reconstruct a new one? How do they see themselves in the wilderness: as a real human or real woman?

While ecocriticism discusses the relationship between literature and nature, its interdisciplinary nature allows ecocritics to bring different fields into the discussion of the human/nature relationship in literature. Therefore ecocriticism is the base to this study which enables us to discuss the role of nature in literature, specifically, the role of wilderness in women's wilderness writings. Since one of the main concerns of ecocritics is to determine whether "in addition to race, class, and gender, should *place* become a new critical category?" (Glotfelty xix), this study, through selected women's wilderness writings, will attempt to discuss the role of natural environment as a new critical category in the construction of women's feminine identity. While this study discusses the relationship between identity and the natural environment, the interdisciplinary nature of ecocriticism allows us to draw inference from ecopsychological studies on the relevance of human identity to the natural environment. Particular focus will be given to Susan Clayton's Environmental Identity which discusses "the extent to which the natural environment plays an important part in a person's self-definition" (Clayton 52).

The other psychological studies referenced for this study pertain to the benefits of natural environment especially wilderness, on humans. The current study would give especial significance to psychological case studies that show the effects of wilderness

on women. And while the current study attempts to elucidate how a wilderness journey can help women to recognize their true selves hence to attain self-actualization, therefore, the “Wilderness Rites of Passages” defined by Foster and Little would be important to our conceptual framework. The different stages outlined in “Wilderness Rites of Passages” namely: Severance or Separation, Threshold or Transition, and Return or Incorporation, provide in-depth understanding of selected women’s wilderness journeys and the effects on their sense of self.

In order to discuss a redefinition of femininity in women, we have referred to specific studies by Castells and Pecheux, on the three forms of identity construction. Borrowing the forms of identity construction introduced by Castells and Pecheux would enable us to understand how the selected women reject their traditional femininity and construct a new feminine identity.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of this study entail an in-depth discussion of selected women’s wilderness writing in order to investigate the role that wilderness plays; whether as a silent backdrop or a salient character. While it has been established that wilderness plays an effective role, our second objective is to determine the types of challenges and opportunities faced by the woman who dared to take on wilderness. Our third objective is to prove that these challenges and new opportunities have had beneficial outcomes and lastly, to elucidate that these outcomes of wilderness, as a place of transformation, actualize a woman’s sense of self or femininity. Therefore numerically the objectives of this study are:

1. To investigate the role that wilderness plays in the selected contemporary American women’s wilderness writings.
2. To ascertain the challenges and new opportunities that wilderness as a natural context, different from social one, can provide for women in these selected writings.
3. To discuss the benefits and outcomes of a solo wilderness adventure for women who have been historically excluded from it in these selected writings.
4. To find out the effects of wilderness on the feminine identity of women in the selected writings.

1.4 Research Questions

Further research into this study would give rise to the following questions:

1. What is the role of wilderness in the selected contemporary American women’s wilderness writing?
2. How is wilderness as a natural context different from social context for women in these selected writings?

3. What are the benefits and outcomes of a solo wilderness adventure for women who have been historically excluded from it in these selected writings?

4. What are the effects of wilderness on the feminine identity of women in the selected writings?

1.5 Significance of the Study

The dualistic split between nature and human which has been caused by Western culture placed these two in opposition to each other. Nature was thought to exist only for the purpose of satisfying human needs. Coburn in her study refers to Metzner who suggests that “many of our cultural practices today stand in direct opposition to the world of nature that includes wilderness, emotions, and embodied self. Both the environment and our sense of well-being have suffered” (8). Thus, by increasing knowledge about the interdependence of human and nature, both may benefit.

However this interdependency has always been “unnoticed.” The importance of nature to human life and their interdependency has even been underestimated in literature until recent decades, when ‘ecocriticism’ took center stage to discuss human-nature relationships in literature. It was only in the 1990s “that ecocriticism emerged as a separate discipline” to discuss a relationship between human and nature in literature (Tosic 44). Ecocriticism aims to give nature the importance it deserves, by reviving genres like “nature writing” and “environmental nonfiction”. It tries to improve the split between human and nature caused by Western culture, hence to encourage human/nature reconciliation.

Since ecocriticism tries to expand the world view of literary criticism by including the non-human hence to highlight the importance of nature for human, the main significance of the current study is its attempt to reveal the importance of nature for human by focusing on the importance of wilderness adventures for women in their wilderness writings.

In addition, nature as a determining element of identity is not sufficiently explored in literary texts. Modern day studies on the construction of human identity encompass categories such as social, cultural, class and gender whereas the role of the natural environment is underestimated. Clayton mentions that:

Because the social aspects of identity are so obvious and so important, psychologists often overlook the impact of nonsocial (or at least non-human) objects in defining identity. Yet there are clearly many people for whom an important aspect of their identity lies in ties to the natural world: connections to specific natural objects such as pets, trees, mountain formations, or particular geographic locations. (45)

Accordingly, since the relevance of identity to the natural environment is underestimated in literature and calls for more investigation, the other significant aspect of the current study is its attempt to investigate the human identity in natural context rather than social one. This study attempts to fill this gap in literature by focusing on the role of wilderness in “defining identity.” The interdisciplinary nature of ecocriticism allows this study to borrow from the studies done in another fields on the relation of identity to nature and also on wilderness, and to blend them with the studies on nature writings in literature.

The rarity of studies on the role of natural environment in defining human identity is more evident when considering women’s wilderness writings. The inadequacy of studies on women’s redefinition of feminine identity in relation to wilderness is the chief motivation behind the present study. This study will therefore bring to the fore, issues on women’s identity construct in the wilderness. It seeks to expand an understanding of how deep experiences in wilderness can lead women to transformative changes, hence to elucidate the importance of wilderness for women by a focus on their wilderness writings.

Thus, the other main significant of the current study lies in its important purpose to illuminate and highlight the connection between woman and wilderness. As has been mentioned earlier, wilderness has been historically an only-male-sphere, likewise, studies on wilderness writings usually concentrate on male writers while female writers have been ignored and their wilderness writings, underestimated. But in recent decades, women seeking to forge new identities and empowerment are challenging themselves by venturing into the wilderness which has always been associated with masculinity. It has therefore become imperative to represent that “Women can claim the wilderness too, can speak there and read there as women speak and read” (Pagano xx). It is deemed significant to establish whether women too can redefine their identity in the wilderness. By seeking to challenge their traditional femininity, do they attain a new feminine identity? Accordingly, by placing women’s wilderness writings at the center of the investigation, this study contributes to add women’s voice to the studies on wilderness writings.

This study is all the more poignant and significant because it deals with contemporary women whose writings on their firsthand wilderness experiences have been either overlooked or ignored altogether. Because of this oversight, there has been very little research undertaken these women’s wilderness writing and the role of wilderness in their writings.

1.6 Scope and Limitations of the Study

Anne LaBastille writes in *Women and Wilderness* that “to write about “women” and “wilderness” is to bring together two subjects that are each large enough to have generated a whole literature” (2), so obviously it is necessary to outline the scope of the current study.

Since this study aims to discuss a new feminine identity in women, one which gives them more autonomy and competency, it may appear as a feminist one. However the researcher will not take a feminist approach mainly because he aims to discuss the objectives of the study and specifically the feminine identity through a different perspective. Therefore, by using an ecocritical approach in this study, it will be proven that the human/nature or specifically, woman/nature relationship is pivotal to finding women's real abilities and true selves. Austin, the pioneer outdoor woman, has been so critical of feminists because they are city-bound, while their "radicalism rendered them myopic, incapable of seeing the larger picture" hence ignoring "wild places" (Harwell 185-186).

The fine line which sets apart this study from being merely feministic, is well elucidated by the words of LaBastille in her *Women and Wilderness*, she explains that the wilderness women may seem feminist, "but for the most part the wilderness women lack the militancy and hostility toward men that some women's liberation groups display. I did not notice any bitterness in these wilderness women toward men... No wilderness woman talked disparagingly about men" (290). Legler in her article on women's writings on Antarctica conforms: "A startling element" of many of these non-fiction narratives is "their gender-neutrality"; and "The focus on love and intimate relationships is striking in these narratives" (219-220).

So, in the current study, women's feminine identity is analyzed through their relationship with wilderness and through an ecocritical lens rather than a feminist one. Legler's choice of words for women's love of wilderness: "Love for place, and a love for what one has become in place" (220) quite literally sum up the focus of the current study. It is easy to see how bitterness and antagonism towards men arises if we look through a feminist lens:

Feminism means finally that we renounce our obedience to the fathers and recognize that the world they have described is not the whole world. Masculine ideologies are the creation of masculine subjectivity; they are neither objective, nor value-free, nor inclusively "human." Feminism implies that we recognize fully the inadequacy for us, the distortion, of male-created ideologies, and that we proceed to think, and act, out of that recognition. (qtd in LaBastille, *Women and...* 290)

So the current study is not dedicated to the feminist approach but an ecocritical one to represent women in wilderness. It also shows how wilderness can help women to know themselves better and attain self-actualization in its pure natural context.

Since this study discusses women and nature, it may be pertinent to ask: 'Why not ecofeminism? Again, it should be mentioned that the scope and purpose of the current study differs from that of ecofeminism, which blames androcentrism for the domination of nature and women. Based on its view, patriarchal culture of Western societies provides an "oppressive conceptual framework" which follows a same "logic of domination" to "sanction the twin dominations of women and nature" (Warren, "The

Power and the Promise...” 129-130). Through an ecofeminist worldview, environmental and feminist movements are “interconnected”. Hence they are useless if they do not consider each other’s concerns. Victoria Davion puts it all together:

If one grants conceptual links between the domination of nature and the domination of women... thus, those fighting to save the environment should, as a matter of consistency, be working to overthrow patriarchy, and those working to overthrow patriarchy should be fighting to save the environment. At a conceptual level, these fights are inextricably interconnected. (11)

Although the current study deals with women and wilderness, it should be mentioned that it is not an ecofeminist study since it has nothing to do with the interconnectedness of environmental issues and feminist ones, nor does it claim to have an androcentric worldview. However, the focus of the current study is on transformation, which can lead women towards self-actualization through a direct experience of wilderness.

Accordingly, this study will concentrate on the redefinition of feminine identity based on wilderness adventures in selected women’s wilderness writings. This is therefore, an ecocritical study with a literary focus on human/nature relationships, and the benefits of wilderness for women. This study references Clayton’s work which discusses the possibility of redefinition of human identity through a close connection with the natural environment. This study has also borrowed concepts from other studies undertaken in the field of psychology, such as the benefits and influence of wilderness on humans, especially women. Thus, the ecocritical factor will widen the scope of this study by discussing the benefits of a wilderness experience for women and its effect on their self-concept.

Again, it must be reiterated that an ecocritical view is purposeful towards showing the effects of wilderness on a woman’s sense of self, and towards this end, selected American contemporary women’s wilderness writing will be referenced. The chosen works are all non-fiction nature writings or wilderness narratives, and as Garrard justifies; “the ‘wilderness text’ discussed by ecocritics are mainly non-fiction nature writing, almost entirely neglected by other critics” (59).

It must again be mentioned that these selected texts pertaining to non-fiction wilderness narratives of contemporary American women were often “neglected by other critics.” While wilderness texts written by women about their firsthand experience of wilderness are scarce, the following works have been found suitable for the current study: *Woodswoman* by Anne LaBastille, *Becoming Odyssea* by Jennifer Pharr Davis, and *Wild* by Cheryl Strayed. Therefore, the findings and conclusion of this study would likely hinge on these selected works.

1.6.1 Justification of the Selected Texts

The process of finding suitable texts for this study proved to be challenging and time consuming because of scarcity of relevant text since the field is yet mainly dominated by male writers. These texts had to be written by only women with firsthand experience of wilderness: “nature... is open to the accidents of contingency, variation, and chance that cannot be predicted. One cannot, therefore, sit in a London lecture hall and pronounce on the basis of elegant physical laws what the animals and plants of the Americas are like” (qtd. in Nesami 67).

The process of finding suitable texts among the rare wilderness writings of women was further compounded by the fact that certain criteria had to be met, as appended herein:

1. Firstly, while the wilderness journey has been a “defining theme of American literature” (Pufahl 5), and nature writing is most salient in American literature, hence, it became imperative to concentrate on American women’s wilderness writing. Therefore, all the three selected works for this study are by American women.

2. Although women in their nature writings mostly write about “nature close to home” (Anderson and Edwards 3), and Suzanne Roberts also confirms that “because of various fears of being in the outdoors alone, many women write from their own backyards” (ix), this study preferred to choose those who had crossed uncharted territory to conquer wilderness and write about their firsthand experiences. All the three selected works are by women who were courageous enough to pass nights for many months all alone in faraway wilderness.

3. Historically, women have been excluded from wilderness, and it is only in recent decades that women have started to have a voice in wilderness. Hence, this study focuses on selected contemporary women writers of wilderness.

4. Selecting the appropriate texts posed a challenge since selection entailed only works written by women who had undertaken solo wilderness journeys. While most women wilderness writers had been accompanied by male companions during their wilderness adventures, it was critical to this study, to find books penned by solo female wilderness adventurers. While one of the main objectives of this study is to investigate the benefits of a wilderness adventure for women, it must be noted that when a woman is accompanied by a man in wilderness, her reliance on him for physical and mental support would render her incapable of recognizing her own physical and mental strengths. Fredrickson and Anderson confirm that “within the context of recreational engagements women tend to take on sex role stereotypes when in mixed gender groups, hence limiting their experience” (25). Accordingly, in order to avoid the sex role stereotypes, it was deemed important to choose solo female wilderness adventurers. The presence of a man in such a situation would not have offered a different perspective from a social context, nor would have the presence or companionship of other women. Therefore, it should be noted that all the three selected women undertook solo wilderness journeys. By doing solo wilderness adventures, these women imitate

men in their endeavors, in the likes of male nature writers like Henry David Thoreau and John Muir who had also gone into wilderness alone.

5. Another defining quality was that the texts had to be about the writer's very first wilderness experience, to enable comparison between psyche and self in pre-wilderness, wilderness, and post-wilderness. It would also enable us to see the firsthand influence of wilderness, since it is the first time that the selected women are experiencing a context rather than a social one. Hence, all the three selected texts for this study detail the first wilderness experience of their writers.

6. The other criterion was that the selected texts should be about women who had left society to undertake wilderness journeys for a purpose and not merely for recreation.

7. Lastly, the texts were selected based on the duration of their wilderness journeys. It was important for the researcher to find women who had had a long wilderness adventure; a wilderness camping trip of one or two weeks would not qualify. Spending a long time in wilderness areas would provide a better chance for the women to feel its power as a place of transformation.

1.7 Definition of Key Terms

1.7.1 Nature

The word 'Nature' is a broad concept. When it is limited to 'natural environment' or 'non-human', that too would have different interpretations and connotations, which, according to Clayton and Opatow is "complex and contested" (6). We can rightly say that whatever is created by the hands of GOD can be called nature. The traditional definition of 'nature' is "our nonhuman surroundings" (Simmons 11).

Clayton and Opatow, in response to the question "what is nature?," elucidate that "we use the terms *nature* and *the natural environment* in the average person's sense, to refer to environments in which the influence of humans is minimal or nonobvious, to living components of that environment (such as trees and animals), and to nonanimate natural environmental features, such as the ocean shore" (6).

1.7.2 Wilderness

The natural environment is divided into different areas not all of which deserve to be called 'wilderness'. Although wilderness will be discussed comprehensively in the next chapters, it seems appropriate to briefly mention it here since the focus of this study is on wilderness rather than any other kinds of natural environment. There are some unique criteria or qualities that a natural environment should possess in order to qualify as 'wilderness'. Sheppard writes: "Wilderness is nature in her purest form" (13). Being pure and untouched is the most important quality of wilderness and which is also pivotal to the current study. Actually all other qualities of wilderness are important, for

they attribute wilderness with uniqueness, as a place of transformation and psychological well-being.

Besides being pure and untouched nature, the other most agreed definition of wilderness is that it is a place uncontrolled and untamed by civilization. Lauren Harding states that “wilderness originally meant land that was not developed or maintained for agriculture” and that wilderness “also meant land that was not settled or occupied and was therefore ripe for colonization” (46). Hendee, Stankey, and Lucas explain that wilderness is an area “untrammelled by man.” They further explain that the word untrammelled means “not subjected to human controls and manipulations that hamper the free play of natural forces” (68). Actually there are different definitions of wilderness, all of which suggest certain qualities to wilderness. The most general and accepted definition of wilderness, and which is explicated in this study, is that which is defined by Wilderness Act as being a pure and untouched nature, faraway and uncontrolled by civilization, and uninhabited by human (Howard 16).

Greg Garrard believes that wilderness is “a place for reinvigoration of those tired of the moral and material pollution of the city” (59). It is necessary to substantiate Garrard’s claim by adding that it is the place of reinvigoration for those who are tired of their own status quo. It is not only a place of “reinvigoration” but also of “redemption.” As Garrard himself mentioned, wilderness has a “sacramental value” (59-61). In such a context, in contrast to a social one, the human is not in power but is dominated by and under the control of nature. And that is why in wilderness, humans can rid themselves of social and cultural norms which otherwise confine them in a social context. In wilderness, we see the emancipation of women from the stereotypical or traditional norms that society and culture has predefined and confined them to. Wilderness is uncontrollable and likewise bestows uncontrollability or autonomy to its guests.

1.7.3 Identity

Identity is a concept which has broad meaning; Clayton and Opotow declare that “ongoing debates concern the extent to which identity is primarily single or multiple, independent or interdependent, personal or social” (5). Traditionally, identity is linked with self-concept and refers to the often asked question: ‘Who am I?’ Stedman Graham believes that identity is “your personal brand.” We can claim that throughout history, humans have been ceaseless in their attempts to know their true selves. Graham asserts that: “in this sense, being clear about your identity is a significant next step beyond knowing who you are and being comfortable in your own skin” (3).

Therefore, identity is about knowing who we are and such knowledge can be gained through our interactions with others. A person may know him/herself based on the information about self that is received from others. In studies on identity, the ‘others’ have always been considered to be other humans in our society. However, Clayton’s study of identity attempts to broaden the scope of ‘others’ to include non-human or natural environment, because “a broadened conception of identity would include how people see themselves in the context of nature” (Clayton and Opotow 6). While the role of natural environment has been underestimated in studies on the human identity, this

study tries to show that a person can reach a more real sense of self or identity in a natural context rather than a social one. Fisher says that, “nonhuman environment [like] trees, clouds, raccoon... has great significance for human psychological life, a significance we ignore at peril to our psychological well-being” (3).

1.8 Conceptual Framework

1.8.1 Ecocriticism

Nature’s significant role in humanity evolved from the time of early man who would have used stones and rocks as tools to etch symbols and pictures onto cave walls and other surfaces. In almost all literary works, one can find themes of nature. And this fact may have prompted ecocritics like Slovic and Michale to believe that every work can be studied from an ecocritical point of view (xix). However, the significance of nature in literature had been underestimated until the last few decades. It was only in the 1990s that a new literary theory has emerged; one that expounds the important relationship between humans and nature. Glen Love claims thus: “at the beginning of the third millennium and of a new century often heralded as “the century of the environment,” a coherent and broadly based movement embracing literary-environmental interconnections, commonly termed “ecocriticism,” is emerging” (1).

Ecocriticism is one among many literary theories, to have an interdisciplinary study on the relationship between literature and nature. Glotfelty provides a nice short definition of ecocriticism: “What then is ecocriticism? Simply put, ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and physical environment” (xix).

Though ecocriticism is now claimed as an interdisciplinary study, it was at one time, believed impossible to have an interdisciplinary study on literature. Ecocriticism shows that literature can be combined with ecology and studied in a same field with science. It was after the publication of Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* in 1962 that a fear about the destructive behavior of humans towards nature, developed. Therefore, many literary works were produced to create awareness about the importance of nature and for a new conservative attitude toward nature. It can be said that it was through such literary productions that ecocriticism developed as a literary theory.

Ecocritical studies found a niche through the emergence of the Association of the Study of Literature and the Environment (ASLE) in 1990. These ecocritical studies take into consideration, the human-to-nature relationship in literature, or in the words of Glotfelty, “negotiates between the human and the non-human” (xix). It can be claimed that the main objective of ecocriticism has been to discuss the effects of humanity’s destructive behavior towards the natural environment. Nesami writes: “the major purpose of the movement has been the influence of human on nature and the encouragement of preservation of natural environment and warning about the threatening condition of the earth. Therefore, considerable body of critical investigation in terms of articles and theses has been developed regarding the issue” (9).

While the first wave of ecocriticism had mostly considered the influence of humans on nature, the interdisciplinary nature of ecocriticism allows studies on the influence of nature on humans. Glotfelty believes that the “cross-fertilization” nature of ecocriticism enables its integration into other fields such as “history, philosophy, psychology, art history, and ethics” (xix). One such field is ecopsychology which merges environmental studies with psychology. The new theory of ecopsychology speaks about the interrelationship or mutual effects between the human psyche and the natural environment. It discusses the psychological benefits that humans can reap through a “mutual-recognition” with nature. As such, the theory of ecopsychology will also be applied to the current study. While ecocriticism provides the requisite foundation of our conceptual framework, this study also borrows from ecopsychology to strengthen its discussion on the relationship between human identity and the natural environment.

1.8.2 Ecopsychology

Ecopsychology has recently flourished through psychological studies that deal with the mutual connection of human psyche and the natural environment. It is an encompassing field of Psychoecology, Ecotherapy, Ecological psychology, Gaia psychology, Environmental psychology, Green psychology, and Green Therapy. Because of its scope, ecopsychology is a widely used field which connects psychology and ecology. Ecopsychology gained prominence through Theodore Roszak’s *The Voice of the Earth*, and his idea was expanded in his anthology *Ecopsychology*, which he co-authored with his colleagues.

Generally it can be said that ecopsychology is an approach which tries to adopt the interaction between human behaviour, culture, and the natural environment into clinical psychology. It aims to connect psychology and ecology in order to revive the interdependency between the human psyche and nature. Roszak states:

In the century since psychology was first staked out as a province of medical science, we have learned a troubling lesson. The sanity that binds us one to another in society is not necessarily the sanity that bonds us companionably to the creatures with whom we share the Earth. If we could assume the view point of nonhuman nature, what passes for sane behavior in our social affairs might seem madness. (13)

So through a holistic worldview, human’s cruel and irresponsible behavior towards nonhuman connotes “madness,” hence, psychology and ecology are mixed together to restore balance. Nann uses the term ecological psychology instead of ecopsychology, to mean: “In order to build a sustainable world” (283).

To reach this “sustainable world,” human must recognize that the human psyche encompasses both, an inner and outer world. For ecopsychologists, the “collective unconscious” or “Id” includes the whole world; they try “to reexamine the human psyche as an integral part of the web of nature” (Roszak, Gomes, and Kanner xvi). They share this belief with Deep Ecology that “we all are connected.” Hillman writes:

“There is only one core issue for all psychology. Where is the “me”? Where does the “me” begin? Where does the “me” stop? Where does the “other” begin?” (xvii). Ecopsychology seeks to propound these questions in a much broader context to include non-humans as well as humans. According to Hillman:

In *The Voice of the Earth*, an exploration of ecopsychology, Theodore Roszak... extends Jung’s collective unconscious and Freud’s id and draws the rational conclusion that what these terms imply is “the world”... Moreover, an individual’s harmony with his or her “own deep self” requires not merely a journey to the interior but a harmonizing with the environmental world. (xix)

So our “deepest self” is not just confined “within” but also “without.” The recognition of this “id” or “collective unconscious” or “deepest self” would lead us to a holistic worldview. Although the current study is not an ecopsychological one, we need to borrow from it in order to highlight the relationship between human psyche and natural environment, hence to assist our discussion on the relationship between human identity and the natural environment. One of the main theorists of this field is Susan Clayton whose theory of Environmental Identity will be the core of our conceptual framework; this theory will be used to expound the beneficial effects of wilderness on women’s self-concept, in doing so, the other studies done on the positive effects of wilderness on human will be importantly helpful.

1.8.3 Natural Environment and Human Identity

Susan Clayton and Susan Opatow claim that people are affected by their environment. They believe that the identity of human can be defined by an element rather than race, gender, culture, or class which have often been the center of discussions about identity (7-8). Clayton believes “the impact of nonsocial (or at least non-human) objects in defining identity” is overlooked in the studies on human identity (45). The element, which Clayton and the ecocritics believe most to have an effect on human identity, is “place” or more accurately “natural environment.” They believe that the natural environment can help humans to reach a more real self-knowledge (Clayton 49).

Clayton and several other scholars have discussed the effects of natural environment on identity. “Environmental identity” is a term used by scholars like Clayton and Weigret, yet some others like Thomashow, use the term “ecological identity.” Thomashow explains that “ecological identity refers to all the different ways people construe themselves in relationship to the earth as manifested in personality, values, actions, and sense of self” (p.3). Scholars like Thomashow use the term “ecological identity” to show the connection between human and the ecosystem in which he/she is as a part. Holmes also has emphasized the influence of ‘place’ on one’s identity:

Our experience is never of “the earth” as an actual whole, but of some particular place on the earth, a place defined both by physical boundaries and by the actions, concepts, meanings and feelings that

we enact within (or with) it—boundaries and behaviors that in turn play a role in defining us. Indeed, it is the specificity of place that allows it to serve as a basis for or reflection of individual identity; or perhaps place and self-hood are mutually codefining. (30)

Other terms like “environmental self” and “ecological self” are used by researchers like “Cantrill & Senecah, 2001; Naess, 1989.” But as Clayton and Opatow believe “none of these terms has succeeded in claiming definitional turf or achieving consensus on terminology reflects the slipperiness of the concepts” (8). So Clayton in her *Environmental Identity* tries to provide a more theoretical discussion on the issue. Since ecocriticism discusses a human/nature relationship in literature, it thus provides a proper base to discuss the human identity in the light of natural environment in literary works.

The effect of the natural environment on identity is salient in the case of women rather than men. They have more potential than men to redefine their identity in a natural context rather than social one, because in a social context, women are much more restricted than men; therefore, they can gain more freedom to recognize their real self in a natural environment faraway from patriarchal society and its norms. The senses of ‘Autonomy’, ‘Connection’, and ‘Competence’ are usually repressed in women in a social context, but can be empowered in a natural one which can lead them towards more self-knowledge, or in Clayton’s word, to “self-actualization.” The sense of self-actualization may cause women to challenge their traditional femininity, and as a result, redefine a new femininity.

The influence of nature on humans is most powerful and effective when it is uncontrolled and untamed by civilization, as in wilderness. Hence, wilderness can have the most powerful effect on humans. The pure natural environment of wilderness induces freedom of mind to break away from any forms of interference and limitations even self-imposed ones. In wilderness, it becomes humanly possible to attain a real sense of self, one that is not predetermined by cultural or social norms. As mentioned, this quality of wilderness then proves to be more important for women because they are subject to more limitations and prejudice in a social context. In wilderness, they are truly emancipated; free to discover and recognize their real abilities, real selves and attain self-actualization.

1.8.4 Women and Wilderness

Although women/wilderness relationship will be discussed comprehensively in the third chapter, it seems appropriate to briefly elucidate it here since it is an important part of our conceptual framework. Our discussion here will provide the requisite background for the discussion on women and wilderness in the conceptual framework.

Wiber in her book cites Ortnor: “In every human society males are associated with culture while females are associated with nature” (106). Ortnor’s statement is a generally accepted fact among literary scholars as Gardiner also believes that: “Women

are to nature as men are to culture” (31). Sydnie in her book rigidly declares that women are from nature and man is from women; she states that: “The female is associated with the natural world, and generic Man becomes men who are connected with the world of nature through women” (3). Simone de Beauvoir’s famous statement: “Man seeks in woman the Other as Nature” (163) seems to support Sydnie’s views. It is generally accepted that women are closer to nature than men, and that together, man and woman is equal to that of culture and nature. A survey of similar literature shows that many scholars like Merchant; 1980, Ortner; 1974, Schiebinger; 1993, Griffin; 1978, Kolodny; 1984, and Baym; 1985 believe the same idea.

Sperry discloses that “Idea about nature and gender intertwined in Victorian culture” (5). When explaining the dichotomies of Victorian America and social roles of men and women, Sperry writes: “Definitions of Nature were closely tied to definitions of Woman, and representations of natural landscapes frequently relied on analogies to human women. Nature, too, might be tender and motherly or violent and erotic” (6). The gendering of nature as female is also a widespread belief among scholars of the field. Sperry asserts: “Thoreau gendered nature itself female” and according to her, Thoreau inherited this view from “Romantic thinkers” who also “gendered wilderness itself female” (8-9).

Reising, in comparing the nature of Emerson, Thoreau, and Melville, also declares that: “All three (and many other contemporary figures) represent nature in feminine terms” (211). He explains that Thoreau’s *Walden* and Emerson’s nature are explicitly feminine, while Melville’s ocean, although not clearly feminine, is associated with the erotic. Horkheimer and Adorno also describe woman as “The image of nature” (248). Giblett provides a deeper view by blaming the trace of patriarchy: “The concept of nature has a gender politics (to which Foucault was blind...). Nature has been feminized, and culture masculinized, in western and other cultures. Culture has been constructed and troped in masculine terms and nature in feminine ones in the western patriarchal tradition” (29).

According to ecofeminists, it is an androcentric worldview that associates woman with nature and man with culture, which gives man domination over both nature and woman. Wiber declares: “non-white and primitive are linked together with nature and with female, while advancement is linked with culture and with white male.” By “white” she does not refer to “racial category,” but to a “designation of political space” which is based on “political and social issue of ‘us’ versus ‘them’” (105). Giblett believes that there are some “qualities assigned to the culture/nature divide by patriarchal culture.” Based on this, Culture, Activity, Life, Father, Man/Masculine, Reason, are listed on one side of this divide while Nature, Passivity, Death, Mother, Woman/Feminine, Emotion, are on the other side (30).

But the amazing fact is that, although women have always been thought to be close to nature, that nature itself is defined as female, as discussed earlier, wilderness, which is the purest form of nature, has been historically the place of male and not female. While man has always been unencumbered, woman has been restricted to domestic areas. Gardiner believes that “women’s place is in the home... and that their primary interests are and should be courtship, marriage, and the family” (31). Kircher in her PHD

dissertation, writes about her efforts to get her favorite job as a backcountry ranger: “I was aware that the natural world, at least that commandeered by the Park Service [wilderness area], was a man’s domain” (1).

Traditionally wilderness adventure has been a masculine domain, hence the moment a woman ventures into this masculine territory, “her femininity is in question” (Warren, “Women’s Outdoor Adventures” 11). But in recent years, through the efforts of contemporary women, we see a break from tradition that encourages women to take advantage of a wilderness adventure. Psychologists Fredrickson and Anderson, in their case study on the effect of wilderness on women, discuss the new recognition of physical abilities that women can reach in wilderness:

Despite the physical challenge that most wilderness travel presents, many of the participants claimed to have experienced a reawakening to their physical capabilities and a renewed sense of their bodies. Several found that once they overcame the psychological uncertainties they had about their physical abilities, and simply engaged themselves more fully in the challenge at hand, many were left with a sense of deep accomplishment, which invariably bolstered their self-confidence and self-esteem. (33)

There in the wilderness, women can fight against their status quo and recognize their real mental, psychological, and physical abilities by overcoming the challenges that came their way, and hence, reconstruct their feminine identity. Clayton mentions that Autonomy, Connection, and Competence are the three parts of everyone’s identity, which can be empowered in a natural environment (50). In spite of these qualities mentioned by Clayton, a review of other studies done on wilderness prove that wilderness can positively influence different senses in a person, and this can lead to self-actualization. These unique characteristics and outcomes of wilderness, which are especially effective and beneficial to women, will be discussed in the third chapter as an important part of our conceptual framework.

Among the women who dare to enter wilderness, only the rare ones are reckless enough to do it alone. The current study discusses the wilderness writings of three selected contemporary American women who were reckless enough to break borders and undertake long wilderness adventures all alone, namely Anne LaBastille, Jennifer Pharr Davis, and Cheryl Strayed. This study will explore how they redefine their feminine identity through pushing their limits in a historically masculine domain. This changing of feminine identity through a wilderness adventure can be seen as a ‘Wilderness Rites of Passage’.

1.8.5 Wilderness Rites of Passage

Linda Loos in her PHD dissertation, refers to theorists such as Van Gennep and Foster & Little who state that “rites of passage, as cross-cultural initiatory forms, have been utilized through the centuries to mark important transitions in human life cycle” (38).

'Rites of passage' was first developed by Van Gennep to refer to the process of changing from one status of being to another or "progression from one group to the next" (Reeve 44). According to Gennep, every changing process can be a 'rites of passage', even the changing of one season to another. But the 'rites of passage' or 'initiatory process' are often discussed to show the changing of an individual from one 'status quo' to another. Gennep introduces three major phases of rites of passage which are commonly repeated in all initiatory processes and include "rites of separation, rites of transition, and rites of incorporation" (Reeve 45).

Foster and Little, later developed principles based on Van Gennep's theory that provide a 'wilderness vision quest' or 'wilderness rites of passage' which represent the process of an individual's changing through a wilderness adventure. As the current study is also going to discuss the transformation of selected women's feminine identity through their wilderness adventures, so using the three phases of 'wilderness rites of passage' would be essentially helpful in showing the stages of women's transformation during their wilderness journey.

1.8.6 Forms of Identity Construction

Castells and Pocheux, in their studies, separately introduced similar forms of identity construction. Their introduced forms of identity were found to be closely match-able to the stages of a 'wilderness rites of passage'. Castells defines "three forms and origins of identity building" under the classification of "Legitimizing identity" which is the identity "introduced by the dominant institutions of society"; "Resistance identity" which Castel believes "constructs forms of collective resistance against otherwise unbearable oppression"; and lastly, "Project identity" through which he believes that individuals "build a new identity that redefines their position in society" (8-9). Pocheux also defines a similar theory of identity construction through three processes of Identification, Counter Identification, and Disidentification, which are closely similar to the forms introduced by Castells. As the current study is going to discuss the changing of identity in women, it would be essential to refer to these studies by Castells and Pocheux, to validate the current study, since their forms of identity construction seemingly match the process of redefinition of feminine identity of women in this study.

1.9 Methodology

This study aims to discuss the influence of wilderness on women's redefinition of femininity. This is achieved by applying environmental psychology, together with ecocritical perspective, into wilderness writings of selected contemporary American women with first-hand experience of wilderness. To strengthen its conceptual framework, the study takes advantage of previous studies done mostly in the field of psychology, on the benefits of wilderness for humans.

Ecocriticism seeks to discuss the relationship between literature and the environment. Hence the current ecocritical study undertakes an ecocritical mission through

understudying some selected wilderness writings of women. According to Glotfelty, one of the main questions of ecocriticism is: "In addition to race, class, and gender, should place become a new critical category?" (xix). This study also aims to discuss whether "place" can be a new critical category among studies on human identity, or more appropriately, on women's feminine identity. Another main question is: "What cross-fertilization is possible between literary studies and environmental discourse in related disciplines such as history, philosophy, psychology, art history, and ethic?" (xix). This study also tries to take advantage of "cross-fertilization" studies between environment and psychology, on the relevance of Identity to the natural environment, with a focus on Susan Clayton's study.

Since the current study aims to discuss the transformation of women's feminine identity in a wilderness context, certain psychological concepts pertaining to the effects of wilderness on humans, have been borrowed from other relevant studies. These studies play an important role in helping the current study reach its objectives. Among the studies on wilderness, that by Foster and Little on 'wilderness rites of passage' is given priority in this study. While this study concentrates on the transformation of identity in women, studies by Castell and Pocheux on the forms of identity construction are used to discuss the different forms of selected women's identity in their pre-wilderness, wilderness and post-wilderness lives.

Through this study, the characteristics of wilderness, namely: challenge, escape and freedom, indifference, and a place for rites of passages, which have been taken from literature reviews on wilderness, would be studied in selected women's wilderness writing. The study will also discuss the outcomes of wilderness journeys for women including: self-sufficiency, self-confidence, self-esteem, and change in perspective. The effects of these outcomes on their sense of Competence, Autonomy, and Connection, which are according to Clayton, the three parts of everyone's identity, will be discussed to pave the way for the final stage of this study. That final stage will show how wilderness, by its unique characteristics and outcomes, had influenced women's sense of self and caused them to redefine their feminine identity.

Since the wilderness journeys of these women, explained through their wilderness narratives, are looked to as 'wilderness rites of passage', the chapters on analysis are divided according to the three stages of 'wilderness rites of passage' namely: rite of separation or severance, rite of transition or threshold, and rite of return or incorporation. The entire conceptual framework of this study can be molded into these three stages, hence writing the analysis chapters based on these three stages would help the study to discuss the condition, way of life, and the sense of self of the selected women in each stage of their lives and wilderness journey, with clarity. Dividing the analysis chapters according to the different stages of selected writers' lives that span their pre-wilderness, wilderness, and post-wilderness days would also provide a good platform for subtle comparisons and more meaningful analysis, instead of merely analyzing one text in isolation from other two texts.

Accordingly, in the first chapter of analysis, the pre-wilderness life and the condition of the selected women in their stage or rite of separation will be discussed. The type and characteristics of the wildernesses into which they had started their journeys would also

be discussed in the first chapter of analysis. The next chapter of analysis would be devoted to the condition of women during their wilderness journey, and the effects of wilderness on them, which will be their rite of transition. The final chapter of analysis will discuss how these women have been changed through their wilderness adventures at the time of their rite of incorporation.

1.10 Conclusion

Women have historically been excluded and alienated from wilderness. Although in recent years women have tried to claim their voice in wilderness, the studies on wilderness writings have paid scant attentions to women's writings in/on wilderness, hence women's wilderness writings have been marginalized. In the other hand, the concept of self in relation to nature is overlooked among the studies on human identity in literature which usually discuss human identity in social context. In attempt to cooperate in filling these gaps in literature, the current study, having its foundation in ecocriticism, deals with 'women and wilderness' to add women's voice to the studies on wilderness writings and also to show how women can redefine their feminine identity in wilderness. In other words, this study elucidates how women can know their true selves and attain self-actualization in a natural context rather than social one.

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