

DEAR MR. HIKER MAN: NEGOTIATING GENDER IN A MASCULINIZED  
AMERICAN WILDERNESS

by

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## THESIS ABSTRACT

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Nature based spiritual pilgrimage in the form of hiking and backpacking demonstrates a deeply rooted connection between the individual and the environment. However, wilderness as a concept has been constructed through a male lens. Male voices have been championed over their female contemporaries. The rigid gender expectations projected within the binary sex/gender system reinforce the idea that nature is a “boys’ club.” By deconstructing the concept of wilderness, I illuminate a gender bias in outdoor pursuits. I explore the ways women have negotiated their own diverse and intersectional identities within the gendered space of wilderness.

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To the strong women in my life

and

To all of the women with a wild spirit, keep climbing those mountains.

“The trail climbs higher and the wind grow stronger. I stumble forward, one foot at a time. I feel angry at the trail, at myself, at the universe, at everything. I’m dehydrated and hungry, but there’s nowhere to stop and rest. The only thing to do is keep moving.

Time disappears, and it is just me and the mountain, and the wind. I have always been in the windstorm, I think, as I fight my way forward. And I will always be in this windstorm. Up ahead, on a ridge, is a single tree. Someday, I think, I am going to be reincarnated as that tree. As punishment for every choice I’ve ever made.

Or as a reward.”

Carrot Quinn, *Thru-Hiking Will Break Your Heart* (2016: 5)



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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

**“I realized I had been relying on a male translation of nature rather than listening to my own voice.”**

-Suzanne Roberts (2012: 251)

In 1993, Suzanne Roberts and two female friends completed the 211 miles of the John Muir Trail in the Eastern Sierra Mountains of California. The trail runs from Yosemite National Park in the North to Mount Whitney in the South, the tallest peak in the continental United States, standing at 14,505 feet above sea level. The John Muir Trail (or the JMT as it is affectionately called) is a challenging high altitude climb over several peaks and across one of the most rugged mountain ranges in the world. At the end of her trip, sleeping (illegally) atop Half Dome in Yosemite, Suzanne reminisced about her trip, her newly found freedom and about her experience. The quote above speaks to the experience of many female hikers. The American wilderness was created in the male voice by writers such as Henry David Thoreau, John Muir, and Ralph Waldo Emerson, among many others. In literature and popular culture, male voices have been and still are privileged over female voices which have been hushed if not silenced. By privileging the male perspective, space becomes culturally gendered. Americans enculturate their children to recognize wilderness as a male space, reinforcing men as rugged versus women as delicate and domesticated. It is my intention to explore the ways in which female hikers negotiate their own identities in this masculinized American wilderness to find both place and voice in the outdoors.

I begin by providing my methodology, followed by a brief theoretical framework to contextualize my analysis. I then provide an analysis of the construction of the concept of wilderness through historical documents, literature and popular culture. Through an analysis of literature, poems, novels, guide books, blogs, television shows and films I will explore the cultural assumptions of the American wilderness in relation to the dominant cultural gender binary. I then provide an overview of the results of my survey, interviews and participant observation with female hikers. I have found that while women have spent generations advocating for the environment, lobbying for land rights and enjoying the wild Earth, their voices remain unheard, their efforts unrecognized, their perspective unknown. Furthermore, today women are enculturated to believe that the outdoors, the wild, wilderness is a place that is unsafe for them. Women are fearful, not of the dangerous animals, weather or accidents, but instead of other people. The women who overcome both the fear and the cultural policing restricting their access to wild places are actively changing the narrative for women in wilderness. These women are rejecting assumptions, refusing cultural constructs, crafting a new narrative surrounding women in the woods.

## CHAPTER II

### METHODOLOGY

To ethnographically grasp the diversity of experiences of contemporary female hikers I utilized a mixed methods approach. I incorporate qualitative interview data with quantitative survey data and participant observation. I have also collected information from a variety of materials, including historical documents, literature, poems, memoirs and novels, television shows, and films.

I conducted an online survey of both men and women with twenty-one questions<sup>1</sup>. Questions were asked with open response boxes to allow respondents to write as much or as little as they liked. I also collected demographic information including: age, race, income, occupation, religious identity and gender identity. Other logistical information was also collected such as: hometown, familiarity with hiking/outdoor pursuits, knowledge of trails, etc. The survey was advertised on Facebook pages associated with women's hiking groups. There were 194 respondents.

I paired these survey responses with semi-structured interviews conducted with twenty self identified women. I chose to interview only women as I wanted to collect narratives of women in wild spaces. Interviewees were asked the same questions<sup>2</sup> as the survey re-

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<sup>1</sup> Survey questions are in APPENDIX A.

<sup>2</sup> Interview questions are in APPENDIX B.

spondents but the use of an informal semistructured interview allowed for a conversation about the topic rather than a singular answer. Both survey and interview responses were collected using a convenience sample. Interviews were a combination of convenience and snowball sampling. Many of these women were friends of friends. Interviews were conducted in person when possible, though many were phone interviews.

I wrote field notes after hikes and during interviews and combined them with quickly written notes called “jottings” (Bernard 2011) and a personal journal that I wrote to document my own experience as a female hiker.

I provided all respondents with an overview of my research projects prior to our interview but also gave a more in-depth explanation of the project after speaking with them both to avoid biasing responses during the interview and, once the interview was completed, to be more transparent about the motivations for this research. I also received approval from the Institutional Review Board at the University of Oregon’s Research Compliance Services.

I will be utilizing my own experience as a female hiker in relation to the interviews and survey data I have collected. I grew up in sunny Southern California, where most of the year is fit for outdoor pursuits. I spent spring through late fall car camping on weekends with my family. When we weren’t camping we’d spend days exploring the Angeles National Forest. I grew up in a family that prioritized time outside. Since I was six I have

spent every summer taking trips to the Eastern Sierra. I sat in the camp site looking up at the stunning granite mountains, gnarled and rough, desperate to truly understand their reality. I used college to better understand the geology, geography, and cultural history. I have spent my graduate school career investigating why other people get outside. For me, outside is home. Being surrounded by more natural space than human construction is a necessity for my mental and emotional health. For this reason, I am inherently biased. My cultural upbringing prioritized natural space and wilderness areas. I am a bleeding heart environmentalist who believes deeply in the rights of nature. And I will not deny my investment in this research. I want desperately to bring attention to the importance of wild spaces to the human experience while simultaneously deconstructing rigid cultural values that restrict the access of these spaces to some people, in this case women.

The analysis of this data is enriched with my own participant observation. I spent September 2016 to April 2017, exploring different hiking trails not only in the state of Oregon, but also in the Eastern Sierra. I include my reflections on my experience, my observations of other hikers, and my conversations on the trails. I also read and analyzed selected excerpts from hiking and backpacking memoirs and blog posts by both male and female writers including Cheryl Strayed, Suzanne Roberts, Mary Austin, Susan Alcorn, and Beverly “Maine Rose” Hugo among many others. These texts are utilized as first hand accounts. I utilize memoirs written by both men and women to compare the voice and audience of these works, as well as their impact on popular culture. I include the impact on popular culture because I believe popular culture reflects cultural expectations.



Furthermore, as American culture has undoubtedly glorified fame and wealth, popular culture is often a place of romanticization and striving. Enculturation takes place through the dissemination of popular culture. The characters in our favorite shows, in our favorite movies and the celebrities who create these characters demonstrate expectations and social norms.

Because I am a feminist and an environmentalist I find it critical to acknowledge my personal motivations both to the readers of this work and more importantly to those who were kind enough to participate. Due to these biases, I am both reflexive and reflective in my methodology and analysis. I am inspired by Lila Abu-Lughod's version of Bourdieu's practice theory (2014) which avoids a static representation of cultural practices and instead attempts to capture the dynamic change of cultural practices.

In my analysis I found my personal connection influenced my ability to be entirely objective. My perspective is both emic and etic, blurring the lines each time my experience mirrored a story I was told by a respondent. Sabina Magliocco explains, "The trouble with categories such as 'emic' and 'etic,' 'insider' and 'outsider' is that they presume identity to be fixed and essential, rather than the shifting, negotiated, contextual construction we know it to be," (2004:15). I find that negotiating my own position is best executed by using the concept of reflexivity proposed by Ruth Behar (1993). Sharing my own experience and perspective with consultants provided a window into my subjectivity and biases, contextualizing my positionality within this work.

I have decided to reject the illusion of objectivity. Instead, I embrace my subjectivity as a female hiker and scholar. In my analysis I emphasize the variation in experience alongside the similarities in particular aspects of identification as female in the context of wilderness. Together the stories I document create a narrative of diverse but connected stories, a collection of visions that reflect an objective reality (Haraway 1988). Furthermore, my words are mine. I am only capable of my own subjective experience and will recount stories, encounters and interviews as best I can (McCarthy Brown 1991: 18-20). Finally, in order to avoid a static or biased representation of the experiences of others, I modeled my research on Elaine Lawless' reciprocal ethnography (1992), providing my respondents with the initial draft of this thesis and allowing them to read and respond to my interpretations and representations. Their responses are included in a later section.

**CHAPTER III**  
**THEORY, HISTORY, AND CONTEXT OF**  
**AMERICAN WILDERNESS**

The concepts of nature, and consequentially wilderness, have always been culturally constructed. William Cronon, in Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature, explains:

“The work of literary scholars, anthropologists, cultural historians, and critical theorists over the past several decades has yielded abundant evidence that ‘nature’ is not nearly so natural as it seems. Instead, it is a profoundly human construction.... This is not to say that the nonhuman world is somehow unreal or a mere figment of our imaginations — far from it. But the way we describe and understand that world is so entangled with our own values and assumptions that the two can never be fully separate” (Cronon 1996: 25).

The inherent subjectivity of human beings due to our enculturation leads to constructed perceptions of reality. Nature exists only within its culturally taught understanding. Furthermore, wilderness as a category cannot exist without the separation between human and land, environment, nature. Wilderness is a category constructed in opposition to humanity, civilization and urban spaces.

The use of the words nature, wild and wilderness are deeply rooted in “semantic history that tracks backward to the medieval church and even to classical antiquity, implying without much reflection that nature is One Thing with One Name, a monolith that can be described holistically in much the same way as God” (Cronon 1996: 35). This connection to monotheistic religion clouds the cultural meanings of nature; nature becomes pure, free of cultural context because it is “natural.”

Describing something as natural, or an action as “part of it’s nature” removes a need to probe furthermore, nature becomes essential, inherent, unquestioned (Cronon 1996: 35).

Roderick Nash similarly problematizes nature and wilderness as categories of space:

“‘Wilderness’ has a deceptive concreteness at first glance. The difficulty is that while the word is a noun it acts like an adjective. There is no specific material object that is wilderness. The term designates a quality (as the ‘-ness’ suggests) that produces a certain mood or feeling in a given individual and, as a consequence, may be assigned by that person to a specific place” (Nash 1967: 1).

Human beings are dependent on our ability to interpret within systems. Culture acts as a system of knowledge that determines appropriate behavior, language and practice. Our cultural system creates and maintains categories that maintain order and sense. In this way our subjective cultural reality becomes fact, and nature becomes separate from humans, and wilderness represents what was before humanity. Within this framework I will explore our enculturated notion of wilderness as a gendered space.

Furthermore, I will utilize the work of Michele Foucault and Judith Butler to deconstruct gender. In The History of Sexuality Foucault unpacks the “deployment of sexuality” as a tactic of culture to police the unfamiliar (in this case the non-binary, non-heteronormative).

Through four methods, (1) the hysterization of women’s bodies, (2) the pedagogization of children’s sex, (3) the socialization of procreative behavior and (4) the psychiatrization

of perverse pleasure, Foucault is able to assert that “deployment of sexuality” is a means of cultural policing, reinforcing the heteronormative system of binary gender and reproduction. Utilizing this framework, Butler expands on this notion, arguing that biological sex is synonymous with gender, as both male and female are performed as man and woman, masculine and feminine respectively (1990: 8–9). This oppressive and restrictive cultural binary extends beyond the performance of the individual to cultural objects and space. Wilderness has been constructed from a masculine perspective, appropriated as a place for performance of masculinity. Cultural constructions of space and gender identity determine the access to and experience of wild spaces. Women are expected to perform femininity in feminine spaces and wilderness constructed with the expectation of a masculine performance thus females are “out of place.” Female hikers must negotiate their gender identity in relation both to their performance as self-identified women, and also within a gendered space, the masculinized wilderness. Below I will demonstrate the ways in which wilderness has been constructed as a male space by utilizing examples from American historical events, literature, folklore, art, and popular culture. I will then utilize my interview and survey data to explore the ways in which women have negotiated their identities in the masculinized American wilderness.

### *Gendered American Wilderness*

Suzanne Roberts mentions in her reflection, “I had found that the more time I spent in wild places, the more fear has receded, calmed perhaps by the natural world itself. I’ve started to learn I can make my own maps rather than follow the lines drawn for

me” (2012: 251). I interpret the maps of which she speaks to be those of comfort, entitlement and freedom, concepts often denied to women. Women in this country have fought for equality for over a century, and the battle continues even today. For this reason I will deconstruct the creation of the concept of wilderness and the ways in which the wild has been deemed a masculinized space.

It is important to begin by explaining that wilderness itself is not a physical place, but rather a concept. There is no unmanaged or “pristine” land in this country. All land in the United States is owned or regulated. The notion of “pristine” nature is also a falsehood. The image of pure wilderness has been crafted as a lure for tourism and national identity. This country’s land was taken from the Indigenous people who populated what is now protected as “untouched” or “wild” land. As explained by Nash, wilderness is deceptive. Wilderness is neither a material object nor a particular space, as Nash pointed out above. Rather, it is a construct of personal experience and social expectation. Land designation has also been culturally constructed, as have gender identities and expectations. Thus I aim to deconstruct both the American construction of wilderness in relationship to the sex/gender system to show how these two systems work together to restrict and confine how hiking has been conceptualized and practiced.

### *Regulation and Management of American Wilderness*

Although wilderness and nature are terms often used synonymously they need to be defined. Indeed, these words carry a great level of political and, for some, cultural weight.

Nature, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, is, “The phenomena of the physical world collectively, including plants, animals, the landscape, and other features and products of the earth, as opposed to humans or human creations.” Nature is present everywhere, always. Sunlight, a breeze, fresh air and water are all aspects of nature that most people encounter several times a day. The term “wilderness” (with a lowercase w) is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as, “An uncultivated, uninhabited, and inhospitable region,” which is how most people define the term. However, “Wilderness” (note the capitalized W) is a very specific thing.

In 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed into law the Wilderness Act. This was a turning point in the cultural construction of American outdoor space. Jonah Raskin explains:

“The wilderness gestalt changed radically in 1964... [which] gave birth to specific Wilderness areas that might be desert, forest, mountain, or valley. From then on there was lower case wilderness and upper case Wilderness, and sometimes the lower case wilderness was less tamed than federally protected Wilderness areas that often became playgrounds for the wealthy who could afford to take long vacation, make long journeys and spend heaps of money” (Raskin 2014:15).

The creation of a distinct Wilderness altered and dichotomized wild space. The Wilderness Act both defines and outlines several protections for American Wilderness. Section 2(a) of the Wilderness Act states:

“In order to assure that an increasing population, accompanied by expanding settlement and growing mechanization, does not occupy and modify all areas within the United States and its possessions, leaving no lands designated for preservation and protection in their natural condition, it is hereby declared to be the policy of the Congress to secure for the American people of present and future generations the benefits of an enduring resource of

wilderness. For this purpose there is hereby established a National Wilderness Preservation System to be composed of federally owned areas designated by Congress as ‘wilderness areas’, and these shall be administered for the use and enjoyment of the American people in such manner as will leave them unimpaired for future use as wilderness, and so as to provide for the protection of these areas, the preservation of their wilderness character, and for the gathering and dissemination of information regarding their use and enjoyment as wilderness; and no Federal lands shall be designated as ‘wilderness areas’ except as provided for in this Act or by a subsequent Act.”

Section 2(b) states:

“The inclusion of an area in the National Wilderness Preservation System notwithstanding, the area shall continue to be managed by the Department and agency having jurisdiction thereover immediately before its inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System unless otherwise provided by Act of Congress.”

And finally, Section 2(c) defines wilderness as:

“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 its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain. An area of wilderness is further defined to mean in this Act an area of undeveloped Federal land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions and which (1) generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable; (2) has outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation; (3) has at least five thousand acres of land or is of sufficient size as to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition; and (4) may also contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value.

The National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS) comprises a total of approximately 110 million acres of federally protected land (Strong 2016). Over half, 56.6 million acres, are in Alaska and nearly all of the rest in the Western States (Strong 2016). It is



critical to recognize that all land in the United States is regulated in some way. All land that is not privately owned is locally, federally, or state run. Unregulated land does not exist; all wild spaces are managed. Furthermore, the United States government asserts that Wilderness is humanless, a place, “where man himself is a visitor who does not remain.” This not only erases the Indigenous populations who lived on these lands before colonization, genocide and Westward expansion, but also creates a dichotomy of human versus environment, *man* versus Wilderness.

The United States federal government has four agencies to manage wilderness areas: (1) National Park Service (NPS), (2) United States Forest Service (USFS), (3) Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and (4) Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS). NPS, BLM and FWS are part of the Department of the Interior, whereas the USFS is in the Department of Agriculture. Each of these agencies creates a distinct classification of land and carries a unique purpose. Firstly, The National Park Service was created August 25, 1916 when President Woodrow Wilson signed the “Organic Act” that states:

“the Service thus established shall promote and regulate the use of the Federal areas known as national parks, monuments and reservations...by such means and measures as conform to the fundamental purpose of the said parks, monuments and reservations, which purpose is to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations” (NPS “History” acc. April 1, 2017).

The NPS serves to provide use and enjoyment, a means for preservation while encouraging tourism and visitation. Yosemite, while not the first National Park, was critical in the

development of the National Park Service. President Abraham Lincoln signed the Yosemite Grant in 1864 after Galen Clark and others successfully lobbied for its protection (NPS “Galen Clark” n.d.). Yosemite Valley and Mariposa Grove, Galen’s true love, were transferred to the State of California as a “grant reserved from settlement” (NPS “Galen Clark” n.d.) Later, John Muir famously led a movement toward a larger system of national parks, using Yosemite and Yellowstone as his platform. In 1872, the United States Congress and President Ulysses S. Grant created the world’s first National Park, Yellowstone (“Yellowstone” n.d.). However, it was nearly two decades before another National Park was created. In 1890 both Sequoia and Yosemite were added to the National Park System<sup>3</sup>. (NPS "Creating Tradition" n.d.). The Antiquities Act of 1906, signed by President Theodore Roosevelt, granted the President the right to proclaim national monuments on lands already under federal jurisdiction (NPS “History” n.d.).

In 1933 an Executive Order expanded the National Park Service by transferring 56 national monuments and military sites from the US Forest Service and the War Department (NPS “History” n.d.). In 1916 with the creation of the National Park Service (NPS) the number of parks began to grow: Crater Lake (1902), Wind Cave (1903), Sully's Hill (1904), Mesa Verde (1906), Platt (1906), Glacier (1910), Rocky Mountain (1915), Hawaii (1916), and Lassen Volcanic (1916) (NPS "Creating Tradition" n.d.). Currently, “The National Park System of the United States now comprises more than 400 areas covering more than 84 million acres in 50 states, the District of Columbia, American Samoa,

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<sup>3</sup> Yosemite remained under state control until 1906 (NPS “Creating Tradition” n.d.)

Guam, Puerto Rico, Saipan, and the Virgin Islands. These areas are of such national significance as to justify special recognition and protection in accordance with various acts of Congress” (NPS “History” n.d.). There are 59 National Parks. The National Park Service provides the highest level of protection for federal lands, as their mission statement explains, “The National Park Service preserves unimpaired the natural and cultural resources and values of the National Park System for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations” (NPS “About Us” n.d.). The preservation of the NPS ensures the highest level of protection of land.

Secondly, the United States Forest Service is tasked with determining the appropriate use of our national forest resources including recreation, wildlife, wilderness, timber, mining, grazing, oil and gas, hunting and fishing (Strong 2016). Forest management by the federal government began in 1876 when “Congress created the office of Special Agent in the U.S. Department of Agriculture to assess the quality and conditions of forests in the United States” (USFS “Our History” n.d.). This oversight was expanded in 1881 to the office into the Division of Forestry before the Forest Reserve Act of 1891 was passed by Congress which allowed the President to designate “forest reserves” of the public land in the West (USFS “Our History” n.d.). In 1905 President Theodore Roosevelt transferred these lands from the US Department of Agriculture to the new US Forest Service, led by Gifford Pinchot (USFS “Our History” n.d.). The USFS was initially created to “provide quality water and timber for the nation’s benefit” (USFS “Meet the Forest Service” n.d.). However, the Forest Service’s current task is “management... for additional multiple uses

and benefits and for the sustained yield of renewable resources such as water, forage, wildlife, wood, and recreation” (USFS “Meet the Forest Service” n.d.). The Forest Service operates with the motto “Caring for the Land and Serving People,” accomplished through five main practices: (1) Protection and management of natural resources on lands we manage, (2) Research on all aspects of forestry, rangeland management, and forest resource utilization, (3) Community assistance and cooperation with state and local governments, forest industries, and private landowners to help protect and manage non-Federal forest and associated range and watershed lands to improve conditions in rural areas, (4) Achievement and support of an effective workforce that reflects the diversity of the American people, and (5) International assistance to formulate policy and coordinate U.S. support for the protection and sound management of the world's forest resources (USFS “Meet the Forest Service” n.d.).

Third, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) was established in 1946 but can be traced to the post Revolutionary War period. The General Land Office was created in 1812 to support the notion of Manifest Destiny as homesteading and movement to the West ensued (BLM “History” n.d.). As attitudes toward public land shifted, so did the federal bodies regulating them and, thus, Congress merged the General Land Office with the United States Grazing Service to create what is now known as the Bureau of Land Management (BLM “History” n.d.). While BLM was initially tasked with managing rangelands for mining, grazing, oil and gas development in 1976, their oversight was expanded to include wilderness and recreation (Strong 2016).

Finally, Fish and Wildlife Service administers “a national network of lands and waters for conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats” (Strong 2016). These four entities account for all federally owned wild land. In various capacities these agencies are utilized for conservation efforts, regulations and maintenance and, in some cases, tourism. I will expand further on the importance of the political framework in which these agencies were created and how this contributes to a gendered perspective of the land they regulate.

### *Creating An American Wilderness*

As early as the era of Manifest Destiny and the exploration of the American West, there has been a sense of entitlement, curiosity and excitement about the “wilderness.” The American wilderness was viewed by Europeans as a frightful place. An early colonial leader and minister, William Bradford, described the American wild as, “a hideous and desolate wilderness, full of wild beasts and wild men” (Taylor 2010: 43). Raskin further explained, ““He also vowed that for the sake of God he was ‘ready to perish in the wilderness,’” (Raskin 2014: 37). White Europeans feared wild beasts and wild men, but a sense of entitlement and superiority (both over the Native peoples and the land) instilled by a feeling of moral supremacy fueled their claims to settlement of this country<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> It is important to acknowledge the implications of colonization and white supremacy in both the origins of the United States and in the construction of the “American Identity.” The erasure of Indigenous populations and oppression of People of Color are a very real part of American history and a factor in the construction of national identity that persists today.

American beliefs of wilderness were drastically different. Puritan ministers such as Cotton Mather and Jonathan Edwards espoused a Platonic association between nature and the sacred; both Mather and Edwards connected the natural world to divine creation (Taylor 2010: 44). This sentiment is echoed in assertions made by Cronon who explains that while nature carries a connotation of the essence of a thing, a pure reality, it also holds an association with God and the divine. Nature as Eden is a theme that can encourage the individual to view a particular landscape as so perfect and inherently good (i.e. in relation to God, pure and holy) that to act in any way but to preserve and celebrate it would align oneself with evil (Satan, the unholy) (Cronon 1996: 37).

Nature as Eden has been applied to many particular American landscapes, perhaps most prominently to Yosemite. Kenneth Olwig describes the ways Yosemite acted as national symbol of a holy paradise for 19th century Americans; Yosemite was “an ideal combination of pristine wilderness and pastoral garden” (Cronon 1996: 37). The ability of Yosemite to reflect an Eden-like paradise helped to forge the importance of natural land in the American mind. Connected to the deeply Christian values of human entitlement and superiority, Yosemite gained prominence through the Nature as Eden paradigm.

Furthermore, Yosemite, in particular, was presented as a holy place to its most prominent proponent, John Muir., Speaking about the Sierra as a creation of God, Muir explains, “The place seemed holy, where one might hope to see God.... Thanks be to God for this immortal gift” (Muir 1991: 65); and “the air is distinctly fragrant with balsam and resin

and mint, every breath of it a gift we may well thank God for. Who could ever guess that so rough a wilderness should yet be so fine, so full of good things... God himself seems to be always doing his best here, working like a man in a glow of enthusiasm” (Muir 1911: 80). The popularity of Muir’s writing and his prominent environmental activism in the Sierra Club made him a well known man in his lifetime, and his work greatly influenced the general public. The connection of nature and wilderness to early American Christian ideals cemented wilderness as a prominent symbol of American identity.

The United States’ short history had yet to offer traditions in literature, art or music, but wilderness could be uniquely American (Nash 1967:67). The romanticization of Transcendental thought in which wilderness carried an intrinsic value meshed with the American exceptionalist need for a unique and inherently superior “American place.” As Roderick Nash explained, “The nation’s short history, weak traditions and minor literary and artistic achievements seemed negligible compared to those of Europe. But in at least one respect Americans sense that their country was different: wilderness had no counterpart in the Old World” (Nash 1967:67). American Nationalists, searching for a clear, defined and inherently superior American identity, championed wilderness as a cultural, moral and national asset in which American exceptionalism could be fostered and proven (Nash 1967).

American wilderness was made particular and written about as such. In *A Lady’s Life in the Rocky Mountains*, Isabella Bird, an English woman, wrote of Lake Tahoe, “I have

found a dream of beauty at which one might look all one's life and sigh... A strictly North American beauty — snow splotted mountains, huge pines, red-woods, sugar pines, silver spruce; a crystalline atmosphere, waves of the richest color; and a pine-hung lake which mirrors all beauty on its surface” (Bird 1960:3). Thomas Cole, an English born American artist, spoke highly of American wilderness, “American scenery... has features, and glorious ones, unknown to Europe. The most distinctive, and perhaps the most impressive, characteristic of American scenery is its wilderness” (Nash 1969: 81). American wilderness became a means of distinguishing America and American traditions from European ones. American art emphasized natural landscapes. American traditions included a ruggedness filled with exploration and hard work. To be strong and hearty enough to endure the wild was part of the American spirit, demonstrating both exceptionalism and the “rugged individualism” that remains a prominent aspect of the “American dream” of success.

### *Thoreau, Emerson and Transcendentalists*

Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson are among the most prominent Transcendentalists of the 19th century. A response to rationalism and intellectualism, Transcendentalism introduced a romanticized view of goodness in both man and nature. Transcendentalist argued there was an existence of a higher reality than that of the physical world and through this belief natural objects were imbued with importance because they were capable of reflecting spiritual truths (Nash 1967: 85). The transcendental ideology split human existence between physical and spiritual, object and essence; therefore, indi-



viduals were rooted to the material world in their physical body but were not limited to this condition. Instead, the human's soul allows for a transcendence beyond the physical body in the material world. Transcendentalist writers such as Thoreau and Emerson reflected on the inherent value of the natural world (Nash 1967: 85). Both Thoreau and Emerson remain prominent voices in environmental ethics and ideologies.

Emerson once said, "nature is the symbol of the spirit... the world is emblematic" (1883: 31). Transcendentalists found wonder and awe in the natural world as it was a mirror for the spiritual. Transcendental thought rejected the ways wilderness has previously been viewed, as amoral, dangerous and frightening. Instead, nature was a place of divinity, sacredness and purity (Nash 1967: 86). The Puritan belief that wilderness and nature were sinful was reversed, instead, Transcendentalists argued, "one's chances of attaining moral perfection and knowing God were *maximized* by entering wilderness" (Nash 1967: 86). These ideas of wilderness as good, sacred and pure drastically contrasted to the European ways of thinking of nature. Transcendental thought contributed to the conception of American wilderness.

Emerson's essay "Nature" articulated themes that would come to be found in nature religions, conservation and environmentalism. His assertions of a sense of belonging to nature, animism, a criticism of human egocentrism and a belief that natural objects "can awaken a reverence" (Taylor 2010: 49) resonate with many even today. Emerson romanticized nature. His Platonic idealism assured him that wilderness was a means of spiritual

discovery and truth (Taylor 2010: 50). Emerson's writings are foundational in that, not only do they remain prominent today, but they inspired both John Muir and Henry David Thoreau. The same themes found in Emerson's "Nature" are echoed in Thoreau's writing.

Bron Taylor argues that Thoreau represents various aspects of his "dark green religion" a nature based religion in which nature has intrinsic value. Taylor identifies themes<sup>5</sup> such as: (1) the simple, natural and undomesticated (free) life; (2) the wisdom of nature; (3) a religion of nature, laws of nature and justice, an ecocentric moral philosophy, loyalty to and the interconnectedness of nature; (4) moral evolution; (5) the necessity of human moral/spiritual/scientific growth; (6) and ambivalence and enigma related to the interconnectedness of the universe and a dismissal of an anthropocentric ideology (2010: 51-4). Each of these aspects contribute to Thoreau's desire to understand the world scientifically while feeling an intuitive relationship with nature. Thoreau espoused an ideology within which people and the natural world could commune.

Thoreau's writings on nature, his experience at Walden Pond, and the essay "Civil Disobedience" inspired many to engage in environmental activism and a more "enlightened" transcendental ideology. Thoreau's contribution to environmental ethics remains crucial even today, so much so that Taylor articulates Thoreau as a Christ figure: AHDT (After Henry David Thoreau) refers to the shift within environmental ideology after Thoreau's death. This shift is not prophetic but more an indication of the clear leadership and guid-

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<sup>5</sup> These items are listed in no particular order and are numbered for clarity.

ance that came from the words of a single man. In the same way that a Christian may enact their ideology in the name of Jesus Christ, Taylor's Dark Green Religionists may enact their environmentally conscious practice in the name or spirit of Thoreau.

The continued popularity of Transcendental writers such as Emerson and Thoreau is indicative of a long lasting desire to get outside and commune with nature. However, it is critical to acknowledge that Emerson and Thoreau are products of their time, and their writings have contributed to the culturally constructed understandings and experiences of the natural world. Their male perspective and voices were privileged into popularity, while their female counterparts remain little known to most readers.

### *John Muir*

Rugged individualism is epitomized by John Muir, the man for whom the trail Suzanne and her friends hiked was named. He also represents how the male voice has been prioritized in concerns about natural space. Muir, a Scottish immigrant, moved to Wisconsin as a young boy. He eventually attended the University of Wisconsin where he became fascinated with geology and natural science (Taylor 2010: 61). A pairing of Muir's love for the natural world with the writings of Transcendentalists such as Emerson and Thoreau led to his "long wanderings." Muir kept detailed and poetic diaries of his encounters with everything wonderful and awe-inspiring. Muir published works (Muir, 1938; 1918; 1911; 1901) which engaged many readers with his passion for the Yosemite Valley, the Se-

quoias and Kings Canyon. Mary Austin, a contemporary of Muir and Thoreau,<sup>6</sup> wrote of similar experiences, in the desert rather than the Sierra, but Austin pales in comparison to the lasting accomplishments of Muir<sup>7</sup>. Muir's writings contributed to the concept of a rugged American identity. His voice became that of the wild, speaking to protect and conserve natural resources (Miles 2009). Muir founded the nation's largest environmental grassroots organization, the Sierra Club (Sierra Club "About" n.d.). And, in his advocacy, Muir provided the underlying philosophy to craft the National Park System (Taylor 2010: 62). Muir's life's work earned him a space as an American icon of conservation, environmental protection and as a voice for the wild.

#### *Pinchot, Muir and the National Park system*

America's National Parks serve as the dominant images of American wilderness to visitors each year. The NPS symbolizes for many the wonders of natural space in America. Men like Muir and Gifford Pinchot saw value in an organized system of national parks. While Muir is considered the father of the NPS, Pinchot and others fought tirelessly to create the NPS.

Muir and Pinchot, however, had drastically different views of what the national park system should be. While Muir advocated for the preservation of natural resources and the

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<sup>6</sup> Several years separated Muir's writings (mostly in the late 1800s and very early 1900s) and Austin's writing (in the early 1900s), though they were both writing about natural landscapes at the turn of the century.

<sup>7</sup> I will expand upon this in a later section.

beauty of places like Yosemite, Pinchot advocated for conservation. These men fought publicly over the ethics of preservation and conservation. This argument was epitomized by the battle over the Hetch Hetchy Dam on the Tuolumne River in Yosemite Valley. Ultimately, Pinchot won and the dam was constructed. Muir died not long after, some believe of a broken heart (Wood, Sierra Club). The case of Hetch Hetchy is a mirror for two opposing sides to environmentalism. Muir, the preservationist, insisted that these natural lands be protected in the fullest capacity. Muir advocated for the National Park system as a means of protection. Muir was opposed to many of the recreational aspects of a park system, allowing cars (which he called “blunt-nosed mechanical beetles”), the building of dams, and the exploitation of natural resources. Muir believed these lands were sacred in some way, a place to be “nearer to God” (Muir 1996: 360). Conversely, the utilitarian approach of Pinchot advocated for conservation rather than preservation. Conservation by definition calls for management and regulated use. Preservation however, calls for protection from use. The National Park Service explains, “Put simply conservation seeks the proper use of nature, while preservation seeks protection of nature from use” (NPS “Conservation vs. Preservation...” n.d.).

Pinchot advocated for the dam (a utilitarian construction to benefit San Francisco residents), while Muir fought it desperately to protect the Hetch Hetchy Valley to preserve its natural wonder and beauty. The battle began shortly after the 1906 San Francisco earthquake showed the inadequacy of the city’s water system. James R. Garfield, the Secretary of the Interior, granted San Francisco the rights to utilize the Tuolumne River for a reser-

voir. Proponents of the dam argued that the narrow outlet of the valley and the steep side and flat floor would maximize water storage (Hanson 2013). Appealing to the preservationists, dam proponents argued the valley was not unique and would be more beautiful with a dam as it would create a lake. Muir argued it would destroy the lichen and remarkable beauty of this spectacular and unique place (Rogers 2012). A seven year battle over Hetch Hetchy was led by the Sierra Club and John Muir. Muir was adamantly opposed to the construction explaining, “Dam Hetch Hetchy! As well dam for water-tanks that people’s cathedrals and churches, for no holier temple has ever been consecrated by the heart of man” (Muir 1912: 262). Since the valley was in Yosemite National Park, an act of Congress needed to be passed to approve the building of the dam. And in 1913 with approval from Congress, President Woodrow Wilson signed the Raker Act which authorized the flooding of the Hetch Hetchy Valley. The battle between the National Park Service, led by Pinchot and the Sierra Club, led by Muir was a clear divide between utilitarian conservation and environmental preservation. Muir’s concern for Hetch Hetchy demonstrates his belief in the inherent value of the natural world. Muir fought for the rights of the land to not be flooded for human utility which demonstrates his preservationist ideology; this can be connected to the roots of what would one day become ecofeminism. Historic moments such as this also demonstrate the male dominance in environmental issues of the time. While many women advocated for and engaged in issues of environmentalism, their voices have been lost as we do not culturally value them as highly as John Muir’s.

Ecofeminism, put simply, is the incorporation of ecological beliefs with feminist concerns related to the male domination of society. During the Hetch Hetchy battle, feminism let alone ecofeminism were far from being prominent sociopolitical causes. This is not to say that Muir was in anyway foundational to ecofeminism. Rather, in 1976 Ynestra King developed the concept of ecofeminism which developed into a movement in the 1980s (Merchant 1992: 184). Carolyn Merchant explains, “during the 1980s cultural feminists in the United States injected new life into ecofeminism by arguing that both women and nature could be liberated together” (1992: 184). Ecofeminists ground their work in analyzing how both women and nature are dominated by men in capitalist endeavors that alter social, political and economic experience for the individual and consequences for the environment (Merchant 1992: 184). While ecofeminism was far from full fruition in the battle between Muir and Pinchot, Pinchot’s utilitarian development of the Hetch Hetchy dam reflects his patriarchal dominance of nature. I am not aligning Muir with ecofeminism, but instead I am suggesting that long before ecofeminism emerged, the utilitarian approach to land usage was intricately connected to a male dominated perspective<sup>8</sup>. Pinchot prioritized society’s need for water, which, in the frame of American history, reiterates the belief that man conquers nature. Muir’s work defending the Hetch Hetchy valley, while invaluable for American conversation, was fruitless. The utilitarian conservation ideology won out: people triumph over the land, man dominates na-

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<sup>8</sup> It is also important to acknowledge that at the time of the dam’s construction, beginning in 1923, women had been able to vote in the United States for under three years. Female voices were just legitimately entering the political sphere.

ture. In spite of this, Muir's efforts did not go unnoticed. Muir's works are still read today, and he is valorized and romanticized.

Following Muir's advocacy many women fought similar battles in later years, but their efforts were not publicly acknowledged. For example, Mardy Murie worked with her husband Olaus to establish and expand Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge ("11 women who..." 2015). Celia Hunter fought along the side of her male counterparts and became the first female President of the National Conservation Organization ("11 women who..." 2015). Mollie Beattie became the first female director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service<sup>9</sup> where she oversaw the reintroduction of the gray wolf into the Rocky Mountains. Anna LaBastille, an ecologist, wrote books, led backpacking trips, canoe trips and photographed the outdoors ("11 women who..." 2015). Rosalie Edge worked fiercely to protect birds. A suffragist and an advocate for wildlife, Edge opened the first preserve for birds of prey, Hawk Mountain Sanctuary in the Appalachian Mountains ("11 women who..." 2015). Edge also led campaigned for the protection of Olympic and Kings Canyon National Parks ("11 women who..." 2015). Majory Stoneman Douglas worked tirelessly to protect the Everglades.<sup>10</sup> Bethine Church worked with her husband to get the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act passed as well as the protection of Hells Canyon National Recreation Area and Sawtooth Wilderness ("11 women who..." 2015). However, Bethine, much like other wives, fell into her husband's shadow. Frank Church, Bethine's

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<sup>9</sup> She became director in 1993.

<sup>10</sup> Everglades National Park contains a wilderness areas named for her legacy.



husband, fought for the passage of the Wilderness Act and is now honored with the Frank Church- River of No Return Wilderness (“11 women who...” 2015). Even writers such as Terry Tempest Williams and Rachel Carson remain less known than their male counterparts.

Furthermore, the lands and mountains within National Parks, forests and monuments bear the names of prominent male figures. While there is one wilderness area in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge named for Beattie’s accomplishments, most are named for men; the predominance of land, mountains and wilderness named for men is profound. A few examples suffice: John Muir Wilderness, John Muir Trail, Pinchot Pass, Donahue Pass, Mount Clark and the Clark Range, Mount Whitney, Kings Canyon, Mount Dana and Ansel Adams Wilderness.<sup>11</sup> Instances where federal lands are named to honor the legacies of women are both more rare and less connected to natural space<sup>12</sup>. For example, the Adams National Historic Site in Massachusetts, the Clara Barton National Historic Site in Washington, D.C., Eleanor Roosevelt National Historic Site in New York, the Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site in Virginia, the Mary McLeod Bethune Council House Na-

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<sup>11</sup> John Muir wilderness and the John Muir Trail were named to honor Muir’s dedication to the preservation of the Sierra. Pinchot Pass was named to honor Gifford Pinchot. Donahue Pass was named for Sargent Donohue who made the first ascent of the peak. Mount Clark and the Clark range were named for Galen Clark who discovered and worked to protect Mariposa Grove in Yosemite National Park. Mount Whitney was named for Josiah Whitney the State Geologist of California who made the initial survey of the mountain. King’s Canyon was named for Clarence King, the first director of the United States Geological Survey. Mount Dana is named in honor of James Dwight Dana, who was a professor of natural history and geology at Yale. And the Ansel Adams Wilderness is named to honor the profound photographer.

<sup>12</sup> The Harriet Tubman National Monument and the Whitman Mission Historical Site are associated with some natural land though are still historical sites rather than Wilderness areas, state or National Forests, or National Parks.

tional Historic Site in Washington, D.C., and the Sewall-Belmont House National Historic Site in Washington, D.C., are all homes or buildings named to honor women.

Winona LaDuke stated, “There are all these big mountains, named for small men” (Rights of Nature, lecture, University of Oregon, November 19, 2016). The mountains, lands, wilderness, forests and parks are named to honor them men who proliferate the discourse associated with wilderness, wild space and natural lands. The women who invested time and energy in wilderness protection are less often noted, acknowledged or known. The practice of naming these spaces after men helps to propagate the notion that they are men’s spaces.

Historically, some female travelers spoke of wilderness as a place not meant for women. Isabella Bird, an English woman and avid traveler explained on her famous Rocky Mountain trip that American wilderness was “no region for tourists and women” (Boorstin 1960: xiii). This view has been continually reinforced by women who have grown to acknowledge the gender bias associated with wilderness. In her guide book, *A Woman’s Guide to the Wild*, Ruby McConnell explains, “... as I grew older, something changed. Regardless of how much time I spent outside, how far into the backcountry I went, or what kinds of challenges I took on, there seemed to be an underlying current — a low hum of voices from the media, the mainstream, and men — insisting that the wilderness was no place for women” (McConnell 2016: xii). McConnell’s motivation for writing her book was rooted in this feeling. She recalls “wasting a lot of time” trying to prove herself

in wilderness rather than engaging wholly, enjoying it and experiencing it herself. She explains that she had often wondered why there wasn't a book about being a woman in the outdoors and confides in her readers that without strong female mentors and her stubborn willingness to learn, she would have given up (McConnell 2016: xiii). McConnell combats these thoughts with the assertion that, "men are no better (or worse) equipped than women to survive in the wilderness" (McConnell 2016: xiii) and encourages her readers to get outside, "there is more to gain from your time outside than you can ever lose in trying" (McConnell 2016: xiv). But McConnell's book is the first of its kind. In December of 2016, the same year her book was published, McConnell turned to social media to express her pride in the success of her book. She explains that her book *A Woman's Guide to the Wild* was "quietly sitting in the top ten best camping books on Amazon. Four of these ten books are male-centric (ex. "The Total Outdoorsman") and only one is written by a woman" (Siobahn 'Ruby' McConnell 12.19.2016). It is clear that wilderness is not inclusive to all genders.

As professional hiker, Liz Thomas explains, "I grew up internalizing the idea, rooted in historic and cultural sexism, that walking solo is unsafe for women, whether in nature or urban settings" (2016). She continues to explain, "unaccompanied women frequently were attacked because women for religious or cultural reasons aren't 'supposed' to be out" (2016). Thomas then explains that through institutions such as the National Park Service and the Forest Service, the notion that the outdoors is not a woman's place, has been reinforced. Historically, ranger's jobs were advertised as "men's only" positions.

She documents biased leadership and the decades of sexual harassment and assault on women in the Park Service. Thomas also discusses the lack of acknowledgment and encouragement that women fail to receive in their accomplishments in outdoor pursuits, much like professional female athletes. Thomas argues that while women are out there pushing the boundaries and shattering the glass ceiling, their accomplishments are not reaching young girls. Through reinforcement of hiking for women as safe and fun, there can be a more gender inclusive environment in the wilderness. The Hike Like A Girl Weekend<sup>13</sup> was held not only as a fun way to engage in the wild, but also as an act of defiance. She encourages all women to get out and enjoy the wilderness. She explains that women's tax dollars are funding protection of public land, yet our society still has not protected the space for all people to use and enjoy. Thomas says that real change happens when "women go out and take that first step in the wilderness" (2016).

The National Park system is a symbol of America's deep passion for wilderness. It was created to protect these places from development and the harshness of industrialization. And while the dominance of males in the origins of the Park Service can be attributed to values of the time, the continued culture of male supremacy and female harassment and exclusion cannot be justified. Just last year, 2016 was the centennial of the National Park Service. It was not until 1929 that Herma Albertson Bagglely became the first woman to work for the National Park Service ("11 women who..." 2015). And it was Bagglely who paved the way for Fran P. Mainella to become the first female director of the National

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<sup>13</sup> Hike Like A Girl Weekend calls all girls and women to post images of themselves in wilderness to dispel the myth that women do not hike and to encourage a more inclusive wilderness.

Park Service seventy-two years later in 2001 (“11 women who...” 2015). Last year, 2016, an investigation was launched into sexual harassment and assault on female rangers within National Parks and Forests. In “Out Here, No One Can Hear You Scream: The dangerous culture of male entitlement and sexual hostility hiding within America’s national parks and forests,” Kathryn Joyce reveals the struggle of combatting sexual harassment and assault on female employees (2016). The symbol of this country’s natural land, wilderness and protected wild spaces is structured by gender bias, male superiority, and entitlement.

Thus, the areas in this country that have been identified as natural space, be it National or State Parks, National or State forests or Wilderness areas, represent the male construct of wilderness in the American landscape. That wilderness, which remains closely tied to the “rugged individualism,” is deeply engrained in the American spirit. Some even argue that visiting National Parks and engaging in American traditions such as camping and hiking are paying homage to the American spirit (Nash 1967). The continued championing of natural spaces such as National Parks reinforces this American identity, the rugged individualism that has been created by men and presented to the public as masculine.

### *Deconstructing Gender*

A considerable body of feminist literature explores the cultural dichotomies of male and female, nature and culture, domestic and wild. In a foundational edited volume, *Woman, Culture and Society*, Sherry Ortner famously drew this connection in, "Is Female to Male

as Nature Is to Culture?” (1972). Ortner explains that male domination is universal across all cultures. She asserts that while women control nature (i.e. carrying and giving birth to children, raising and nurturing children to adulthood, and performing general domestic duties) men dominate culture; she claims that culture is valued more highly than nature and thus men assume a place of power or authority (Ortner: 73-5). Although she claims to reject biological determinism, Ortner draws from the work of Simone de Beauvoir asserting that specific aspects of the female body prohibit a role outside of reproduction. Menstruation stigmatizes women while restricting their activities and social contacts. Pregnancy requires that vitamin, mineral, and caloric resources be channeled from the woman’s body to a fetus, prioritizing the fetus rather than the woman’s own body (Ortner: 74). Because of these bodily functions, the female body is placed lower in the order of cultural processes. However, the female body is capable of the natural process of giving life from her own body as well as the cultural processes of socialization and enculturation of children to be functioning members of society (Ortner: 75).

Furthermore, the work of Michele Zimbalist Rosaldo explores the importance of domestic and public spheres in the dichotomy of male versus female. Rosaldo asserts that while women may at times hold power, typically in the domestic sphere (i.e. the power to raise children, provide food) they are never given culturally legitimized power, that is authority. Women are enculturated into domestic roles that include the pressure and pain of reproduction. Women are seen as unsystematic, intuitive, feeling and sensitive (Rosaldo 1974: 30). Further, a woman’s status develops naturally with time. A woman’s abilities

are not utilized as a means of social capital (Rosaldo 1974: 25). Males, however, are taught to break away from the domestic sphere to become men. A male must perform to prove his worth and ability to succeed in the social world (Rosaldo 1974: 26). Because of this men then appear to be intellectual, rational and instrumental in social advancement (Rosaldo 1974: 30). Women are restricted to the home in a place of domestic “civilization.” They are excluded from the wild where one must prove their ability to survive.

Both Ortner and Rosaldo have been heavily criticized for universalizing the female experience by authors such as Carol MacCormack and Marilyn Strathern (1980), Eleanor Leacock (1992), Rayna Reiter (1975), and Gayle Ruben (1975). These works, while partially discredited remain critical in the history of feminist theory; Rosaldo and Ortner disregarded the diversity of the female experience and essentialized the female experience as one of domesticity. Many women of color, most of which were working class, felt ignored. Acknowledging universal patriarchy was groundbreaking for the time.

Furthermore, Ortner’s assertion that femininity is associated with nature needs to be unpacked. American culture associates femininity with nature, Mother Earth is clearly female for example. However, there is a clear differentiation between wilderness and nature. Ortner assumes that female bodies would be comfortable or accepted in natural landscapes, however, in reality, women are excluded from wilderness because it has been crafted as a masculine space. In Ortner’s paradigm women are associated with nature because of the biological and reproductive processes of the female body such as menstrua-

tion, pregnancy, birth, child rearing, etc.. These biological processes equate women with the unpredictable and uncontrollable natural world. Women, then, should be comfortable and accepted in the non-cultural natural world. But, women are excluded from the American wilderness. American culture espouses women as domestic. Women are expected to marry, bear children and tend to a home for their husband. Female biological processes restrict women to a life at home. The home which is a cultural space, is created and controlled by men. Men's work provides the space for women's domestic work. American culture then, restricts women not to the natural world, but instead to the domestic sphere of which Rosaldo speaks. In addition to regulatory binaries such as Rosaldo's domestic/public, women are also regulated by regimes of sexuality.

In *The History of Sexuality* (1988), Michel Foucault deconstructs sexuality as a method deployed to oppress people. Utilizing heterosexual normativity to restrict biological sex into gendered categories, the process of "sexual liberation" of the 1960s actually reinforces the cultural norms of heterosexual male dominance. As mentioned in the Introduction, Foucault presents four methods for deploying heteronormative sexuality, including (1) the hysterization of women's bodies, (2) the pedagogization of children's sex, (3) the socialization of procreative behavior and (4) the psychiatrization of perverse pleasure. And in the deployment of these methods, there becomes a need to regulate the human body, creating what Foucault terms "biopolitics."



The regulation of the physical body through various means such as standard medical practices, health education, collection of census data, and other means of quantifying the physical body, reduces the physical body to a quantitative number, dehumanizing the individual and oppressing the soul (Foucault 1979). Gender operates the same way. Connected to, but distinct from sexuality, gender carries with it expectations of sexual orientation, reproductive organs and social performance. The binary system allows for all things to be sorted as either masculine or feminine. The categories we create represent our understanding of the world around us. Labels are representative of cultural knowledge and expectations (Hacking 1999).

Sex/gender categories reinforce the horizontal distribution of power, in which individuals can self police each another against breaking the “cultural rules” or expectations. Foucault calls for an abandonment of the terms gender and sex because they are based on oppressive heteronormative patriarchy, and instead suggests the use of the terms bodies and pleasure.

Building on Foucault, Judith Butler explains that gender and sex have been used so interchangeably the distinction between the two is lost. This is problematic in that gender is performed and sex is biological. An individual’s sex is based on anatomy. Gender however is enacted through enculturation and social expectations. Gender can be refused and disregarded. There is no Truth to gender, therefore it is possible for a man to perform a domestic role such as baking a cake, in the same way it is possible for a woman to enjoy

hiking. In acknowledging the differences between bodies and pleasure there is an acknowledgement of the separation of biological sex, gender and sexuality. These distinctions are critical to acknowledge in that the system both creates and maintains the problem. Gender discrimination is founded on the beliefs that (1) gender is an embodied reality, and (2) because gender is real, a person who does not conform to the expectations of their assigned gender is somehow deficient, irregular, improper or wrong. Therefore, when an individual challenges gender expectations they are met with criticism.

In my case, women are told they should not enjoy camping, hiking, hunting, fishing, backpacking etc., women are discouraged from entering wilderness without men, women's capabilities in the wilderness are challenged, women are mocked for their interest in or excluded from outdoor activities. The criticism can be detrimental. For example, in an online blog post entitled, "Dear Mr. Hiker Man" (2016) Juliana Jurenas describes her experience on the John Muir Trail with her female friend. The women encountered many men who questioned their skills, ability, strength and stamina both directly and through comments that can be described as microaggressions<sup>14</sup>.

These women also experienced "mansplaining." The concept of mansplaining was first described by Rebecca Solnit in an essay called, "Men Explain Things To Me" in which Solnit tells a story of a man who, at her book release, assured her there was a book that

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<sup>14</sup> Microaggression is defined as "a subtle but offensive comment or action directed at a minority or other nondominant group that is often unintentional or unconsciously reinforces a stereotype" ("Microaggression" n.d.)

had just come out that she must read, only to be corrected several times by a friend that the book he was assured was better than Solnit's was, in fact, Solnit's book (Solnit 2008). Shortly after the release of Solnit's essay, the term "mansplain" appeared in a LiveJournal post just a month after the publication of Solnit's essay. Mansplain is described by the Merriam-Webster dictionary as, "what occurs when a man talks condescendingly to someone (especially a woman) about something he has incomplete knowledge of, with the mistaken assumption that he knows more about it than the person he's talking to does" ("Mansplaining" n.d.). To put it simply, mansplaining is microaggression in which one person (it does not have to be a man) speaks down to another person (it does not have to be a woman) with a sense of superior knowledge or experience based on assumptions made about the second individual's visible identity markers (i.e. gender expression, sex, age, race or ethnicity, age or other visible characteristics). In the case of female hikers, their clear femininity (i.e. breasts, smaller frame, gender markers such as dress) is a signal they are somehow unprepared or unfit for wilderness experiences. This cues the mansplainer (remember, it does not have to be a man) to condescendingly question or lecture the mansplainees (again, this does not have to be a woman). Women are asked if they are prepared, if they are fit and in some cases if they should be hiking that far, or at all.

In the case of Jurenas, the negative comments about her daily goals, pack weight, and overall preparedness had a negative impact on her. The result of the men's negative comments led to Jurenas beginning to doubt herself. Luckily, Jurenas was able to become aware of these comments and acknowledge that her skills were adequate; she was able to

shift and realize that the biased assumptions of these men was the problem. Social policing such as this “mansplaining” is common. It has been cited by many women in online blog posts including, Amanda Ciesielczyk’s “Women Are the Outdoor Community’s Next Thought Leaders” Krista Langlois’ “Stop Telling Women Not to Go Into the Backcountry Alone” and Liz Thomas’ “The Outdoors Gender Gap Needs to Be Closed.” I personally, have also experienced this type of criticism and skepticism.

As described by Foucault, the creation of the sex/gender system and its maintenance through enculturation have allowed for this type of discrimination and policing. Butler furthered Foucault’s assertions by refuting the sex/gender system in *Gender Trouble* (1990). Butler argues that because biological sex does not exist outside the gender system, there is no separation. Sex is gender and gender is a performance of social expectations. From the time of birth individuals are assigned a gender based on their biological sex. Within this system masculinity and femininity are performed rather than embodied. The performance of gender roles usually restricts an individual’s embodiment of identity. Women who enjoy spending time in wilderness are seen as rejecting the gender expectations of American women. Women who explore the outdoors are performing a “male” role. There is no biological evidence that men are any better suited for outdoor activities, and yet men are believed to be more capable or more likely to enjoy such activities. This leads to problematic assumptions which are exclusionary.

It is important to broadly acknowledge the negative implications of such a divisive system as gender. These strict binaries limit women to, in some instances, a subhuman state in which they are objectified, abused and restricted. Men, however, are also victims of gender expectations. Men are expected to be strong, powerful, independent, at times violent, and emotionless. Men operate in a world in which hyper-masculinity demands a rejection of all experiences deemed feminine, such as domestic skills, emotional introspection and vulnerability, and bonding with a community. Men are expected to be emotionless and powerful and fueled by sexual desire.. These traits reinforce the masculinization of wilderness.

Nature is often depicted as feminine, life giving, embodied in the figure of Mother Earth. Ortnier echoes this too. The exploration and utilization of nature by early pioneers and even men like Roosevelt and Pinchot demonstrates the type of hyper-masculinity in which strength and power dominates the feminine landscape. In our cultural construction, nature is feminine whereas Wilderness is masculine. Wilderness is the deepest darkest space of seclusion and isolation (similar to the powerful, aggressive and emotionless qualities of manhood). Wilderness is where one must be strong, confident and fearless. Wilderness is a place where one must have masculine characteristics to survive and where women must be excluded. Below I will explore the ways individuals have negotiated their own identity in the wilderness despite the socially constructed and gendered categories that restrict them.

*Poetry, Literature, Art and Popular Culture*

Nature was romanticized not only by Transcendentalists such as Thoreau, but also by poets such as William Wordsworth, Walt Whitman, and Robert Frost. The romanticized images of the outdoors that were perpetuated by these poets instill a desire in readers to experience what these men wrote about. One such example is one of the most popular, influential and misunderstood poems by Robert Frost, “The Road Not Taken” that describes two roads in a “yellow wood” (Orr 2012). This poem, which recalls a time alone in the woods represents not only a romanticization of nature, but also the rugged individualism of American culture. Frost’s poem explains that the two paths were worn the same, but he took the path “less traveled” (Orr 2015). People interpret this poem as a story of trail blazing, when in reality it argues that it does not matter which road you take. In the poem, Americans see the “rugged individualism” that is championed in American culture, and especially the wilderness, despite the true message of the poem being that our selective memory often rewrites the experience to be one of grand conquest and success (Orr 2015). Wilderness remains connected with conquest and success, the “rugged individualism” of the American spirit. Frost wrote other famous poems about wilderness such as “Stopping By Woods On A Snowy” “A Late Walk” and the ever popular “Nothing Gold Can Stay.”

Unlike Muir’s poetic writing, Frost often writes about personal experience of events of nature, its beauty and wonder, but little about specific intrinsic qualities. Wilderness in

Frost's poems is a beautiful and romantic backdrop for his words of experience. However, Frost is not the only American poet to write about nature, Edgar Allan Poe, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Wallace Stevens, William Wordsworth and Walt Whitman all utilize the natural world for inspiration. Poetry often encapsulates the idealization of the wonder of nature, creating a tantalizing and enigmatic vision of the wild.

American novelists also utilized themes related to nature and the "rugged individualism" of the American spirit. Writers such as Mark Twain, Jack Kerouac and Ernest Hemingway wrote of romantic landscapes, adventure and exploration. Jonah Raskin explains, "for hundreds of years, Americans have not been able to live without the precious wild that they turned into a fetish" (Raskin 2014:16). D.H. Lawrence argues, in fact, that to truly understand American literature one must accept "somewhere deep in every American heart lies a rebellion against the old parenthood of Europe" (Raskin 2014: 26). In this longing to be distinct and separate from Europe, American writing utilized the tropes of the Pioneer Spirit, rebellion and exploration. Raskin eloquently explains:

"Pioneers plunged into forests on foot, horseback and canoe and later by steamboat, railroad, in covered wagons and on rafts. Hunters, outlaws, soldiers, missionaries and naturalists followed them. In the wilderness they found themselves, discovered riches, battled Indians, chopped down trees and whole forests, made clearings, built cabins, hunted, fished, farmed, escaped from the dead weight of the past and projected onto the land, as though it was a tabula rasa or a huge blank canvas, their dreams, nightmares, hopes and fears" (Raskin 2014: 39).

The wilderness of American writing helped to craft the culture surrounding it. The Pioneer Spirit became engraved in our land, so much so, the land reflects our humanity. We

project onto the wild, both land and animals, as Raskin explained, our hope and dreams, our fear and insecurity.

Jack London's *Call of the Wild* is the epitome of this American ruggedness, of survival, of our own wildness. Buck, a dog and the main character, is sold into service as a sled dog in Alaska. He reverts to a feral state after leaving his home in California, learning to be aggressive and dominant in Alaska. He sheds civilization, instead relying on his own instincts. It is a story of a return to nature, wildness and pastoralism and away from American industrialization and urbanization. Buck is symbolic of every man as he resists contemporary pressures for social expectations and industrialization. Buck's resistance to society and acceptance of his animal nature romanticizes the wilderness in us all, calling for men to once again connect with the outside world. London's book has become part of the American literature canon, and has garnered only praise and respect by critics, fellow authors and readers alike. American literature carries themes of rugged individualism, adventure, exploration and wilderness, both of land and people. In these tales the wonder and awe of adventure and the great wild world are romanticized in a way that reinforces the desire to enact the characters' journeys. People want to see the same things and experience these adventures.

American art also helped provide people with images of wild far away lands. Through art that many people saw wonders of wilderness in the United States. Alaska, for example, was not yet a state at the time of *Call of the Wild* publication. Alaska, like much of the



West remained a distant idea to many Americans settled on the East Coast. Remember, as cited in the beginning of this section, nearly all of the Wilderness in this country is in the Western States, with 56.6% of those acres in Alaska alone (Strong 2016).

Romanticism provided the impetus for many landscapes of American wilderness by painters such as Thomas Cole, Thomas Moran and Albert Bierstadt. All European born, these men were inspired by American landscapes and spent their careers painting them. Perhaps the most awe inspiring was the work of photographers such as William Henry Jackson and Ansel Adams. Photographs brought the pure unexaggerated beauty of places such as the Yosemite Valley directly to people. Photography inspired many to want to visit places such as the Yosemite Valley where Half Dome and El Capitan dominate the views. Photography brought forth a truth to the beauty and immensity of the American terrain that many in the country had yet to see.

The work of Adams remains prominent today. His black and white prints of immense landscapes, his true specialty, demonstrate immense skill and precision. The work of famous painters such as Moran, Cole and Bierstadt were cast aside in favor of photographs. Adams' images of the West provided a view into future National Parks and other federally protected land before tourism brought people to visit these places. Adams' images contributed to his support of conservation efforts and groups such as his dear friend, John Muir's Sierra Club. Images of the profound beauty of places such as Yosemite ignited a

curiosity and passion for the Wilderness of the West. Photography made clear why protecting these places was crucial.

One famous photograph shows President Theodore Roosevelt with Muir standing at Glacier Point in Yosemite (figure 1). It remains a profound image, showing the investment of President Roosevelt into the protection and enjoyment natural lands. It was during this trip that Muir spoke with President Roosevelt about the importance of including Yosemite in the newly created National Park Service. Roosevelt took many steps to protect various landscapes in the United States, first by passing the 1906 Antiquities Act. Roosevelt, a naturalist and conservationist himself, found profound importance in conserving natural resources and space to be utilized by the general public. Roosevelt set aside more federal land, national parks, national monuments and nature preserves than all of his predecessors combined (Brinkley 2009). He established the United States Forest Service, signed into law the creation of the National Parks, designated eighteen new United States monuments, fifty-one bird reserves, four game preserves, and one hundred and fifty National Forests (Brinkley 2009). And because Roosevelt and his chief of Division of Forestry in the Department of Agriculture, Gifford Pinchot, saw land preservation as a means of maximizing our natural resources, his work benefited preservationists like Muir and his Sierra Club. With a leader who advocated so strongly for the importance of public land and protection of Wilderness, America shifted into an area of progressive land protection in which cultural values demonstrated the need for Wilderness.

In media products we can also find the masculinization of the wilderness. Several television shows articulate wilderness via clear gender roles within families and between heterosexual partners. The camping trope has been utilized in classic television shows such as *I Love Lucy*, and *The Brady Bunch*, and in animated series like *The Simpsons* and even in the ever popular *Grey's Anatomy*. The episodes which feature this trope demonstrate the male romanticization of wilderness, his skill or aptitude to handle such a place, his desire to share it; these shows depict women (and sometimes children, also typically female) as unfit, unprepared or uninterested. In one *I Love Lucy* episode Lucy wants desperately to get closer to her husband Ricky and demands to spend more time with him. She insists on going on a camping trip with him despite the fact he doesn't want her there and is sure she will hate it. Lucy has her dear friend Ethel help her "prove" herself in the wilderness by buying a fish rather than catching one, beating Ricky to the camp spot while Ethel drives her there, and pretends to shoot a duck as Ethel drops a dead duck before them. The show reinforces the idea that women are lousy or unfit to be in the wild and would only be capable of proving themselves through trickery.

This is seen again in a *Brady Bunch* episode entitled "A-Camping We Will Go" in which the parents Mike and Carol decide the girls will join the boys on their annual camping trip. The boys confide in their father they do not want the girls to come and the girls insist they don't want to go because camping is a boys' activity. The episode reinforces the stereotype that wilderness and camping are for men. These classic television shows represent cultural values of their time. The men-camping-without-women, or men-camping-

with-women-who-are-inadequate trope has stood the test of time. For example, the very popular show *Grey's Anatomy* furthers this trope with the episode, "Where the Boys Are" in which the male characters set out the woods for camping and relaxation. What was intended to be a weekend of solitude between two male friends becomes a group camping trip. The women of Seattle Grace Hospital mock their partners who have gone to the woods for "fresh air" implying surgeons would be above such an activity. Further, the women are not invited. The men manage to come to blows after discussing their personal lives and sexual escapades. This demonstrates an innate aggressiveness of men in relationship to an ownership of women. Further, the excluded women reinforces wilderness as exclusively male, a place where the men can go to "escape" women.

This trope is not only prominent in sitcoms but also in animation. However, in "The Call of the Simpsons" writers Matt Groening, James L. Brooks, Sam Simon, John Swartzwelder and Jon Vitti poke fun at the trope, inverting the assumptions of male superiority in the wilderness. In the episode, patriarch, and well meaning buffoon, Homer loads the Simpson family into his new recreational vehicle for a camping trip. Homer assures his family they will love nature and camping. He is confident of his abilities, though he manages to drive the family off a cliff, leaving them stranded. His overconfidence and lack of skills is mocked by his son Bart. The males, Homer and Bart manage to survive a chilly naked night in the woods while the females, Marge, and daughter, Lisa make a fire, shelter and domestically tidy camp. Meanwhile, the youngest Simpson, Maggie, makes friends with a bear family and is taken care of by them. Groening et al.

demonstrate the humor in the concept that men are inherently prepared or equipped for the wild by creating a story line in which the women are more capable and comfortable in a time of crisis alone in the woods. The episode ends with Homer identified as Bigfoot and captured. The above sitcoms reinforce gender stereotypes associated with wilderness. And the example of the Simpsons, a show that never hesitates to display the creator's progressive views, shows a satirical backlash against such assumptions. The prominence of such representations in popular culture help us understand the ways in which these gender expectations are passed on to new individuals. Cultural norms are constantly reinforced in the media. Through the process of enculturation and the absorption of cultural meanings in media, such as poetry, literature, art and television, Americans are taught how each gender is expected to react to and engage with wilderness.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **DATA: NEGOTIATING THE FEMALE**

#### **HIKING EXPERIENCE**

I did not expect to find a universal experience among the women I interviewed and whose literature I analyzed. As explained by Haraway (1988), the objective truth is not a singular vision, but a multitude of different perspectives. I aim to illuminate a space for these adventurers to speak their truth with the hope that this may inspire others to challenge expectations of oppressive gender categories and engage with the wild.

I have found many women who are exploring the new identity of “hiker,” “adventurer,” “explorer,” or “outdoor enthusiast.” These women have engaged in these outdoor pursuits for a variety of reasons such as joining hiking groups, be exposed to outdoor pursuits from a young age, wanting to change popular culture and representations in advertisements, but they are still negotiating how it fits into their own diverse and intersectional identity. In some instances women who hike are hesitant to take on the moniker of “hiker” because term is loaded with cultural expectations.

I believe women have diverse and intersectional identities which will affect the ways in which they negotiate their identity within the wild. I have uncovered three ways in which women feel that gender influences their relationship to wilderness: (1) some women felt closer to nature because of their gender identity, (2) some women felt that there is no dif-

ference between the male and female experiences of wilderness, and (3) some women recognize a difference between the experience of male and female hikers, but feel no hierarchy is imposed on these experiences. These categories are not static and in no way an exhaustive list. Individuals are unique. Human agency ensures a dynamic and diverse collection of identities. These categories are intended to provide some means of recognizing patterns in human practices.

### *Hike Like A Girl*

As discussed earlier, the wild in American culture is a very gendered space. In “We Should All Be Feminists” Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie quotes Kenyan Nobel Peace laureate Wangari Maathai, ““The higher you go, the fewer women there are”” (2014: 17). While Maathai was speaking in reference to a social hierarchy, this can easily be applied to the altitude of mountain tops.

In *A Woman’s Guide to the Wild*, Ruby McConnell explains, “while learning to backpack, camp, and hunt are considered important rites of passage for our American boys, American girls are more likely to learn an art or craft, how to cook, or even play a sport before they are taught how to pitch a tent or use a compass” (2016: xiii). While women have long spent time in the woods and advocated for wilderness and enjoyed nature, their representation within outdoor pursuits still seems novel— so much so that Recreational Equipment, Inc (REI) offers women-only hiking expeditions, and guide books like McConnell’s *A Woman’s Guide to the Wild* (2016) seem necessary. The popularity of work

like that of Cheryl Strayed compels many women to finally go out and get a little lost in the woods. These actions are liberatory movements, as women engage publicly with the wild and dispel the notion that they need men. Women are finding community and connection with one another, uniting to forge a place in the woods.

There has been progress. There are proud feminist writers in websites and magazines such as *Outside*, *Backpacker* and *Adventure Journal Quarterly*. May 14, 2016 and the weekend of May 13 and 14, 2017 were “Hike Like A Girl Day” in which female hikers saturated social media with images of themselves tagged with #HikeLAG, to foster an awareness of female hikers and promote female unity in the outdoors. However, serious work still needs to be done to establish a greater level of gender equality. In 2016, the National Park Service’s centennial, the Department of the Interior launched an investigation into sexual harassment and assault on female rangers. In addition, REI recently launched a new campaign, “Force of Nature,” in an attempt to “reset” ideas about outdoor pursuits and put women “front and center.” REI states, “63% of women said they could not think of an outdoor female role model,” and “6 in 10 women say that men’s interests in outdoor activities are taken more seriously than women’s” (Stritzke 2017). REI President and CEO, Jerry Stritzke describes the REI plan: “(1) Changing the Narrative, (2) Creating Community, (3) Closing the Gear Gaps and (4) Investing in Communities” (Stritzke 2017). While this campaign shows progress and promise, the narrative is still problematic. Women are a “force of nature” playing on the timeless notion of “Mother Nature.”

Still women are associated with nature rather than wilderness. There is a clear need for an



exploration of the ways in which the separate perceptions of wilderness and gender, have actually overlapped. In what ways has the dichotomous system of gender created a binary that extends to the physical world? And how have women suffered through the exclusivity of wilderness? In the next section, I will explore the perceptions of female hikers, both of themselves and of their experiences.

### *Memoirs, Novels, Blogs and Popular Culture*

Mary Austin is hardly known in comparison to counterparts such as John Muir and Henry David Thoreau. Austin was a writer, an activist, an advocate and a naturalist. Her work mirrors the love and compassion seen in Muir's writings about the Sierra. She writes clear and poetic descriptions of the desert. She includes personal spirituality and mysticism, as Muir did. Austin writes of the desert, "For all the toll desert takes of a man it gives compensations, deep breaths, deep sleep, and the communion of the stars" (Austin 1997: 8). Her passion for landscape and her deep spiritual communion to it echoes Muir and Thoreau. Muir and Austin can be considered contemporaries both publishing in the early 1900s, (Muir 1838-1914 dying twenty years before Austin 1868-1934) and yet, Austin has not come close to the prominence of Muir. Her work remains unappreciated. This is not to speak negatively of Muir. Muir was a product of his time. His popularity was no doubt due to talent, charisma and a deep passion that fueled his activism, but his immense popularity was also likely due to society's tendency to privilege male voices over female ones. Further, his male voice speaking about the wild, a place that was, to

quote Bird, “no region for tourists and women” (Boorstin 1960: xiii) likely muffled or silenced women who may have echoed his words. But it was not only Austin who experienced this; Bron Taylor writes of Susan Cooper who was writing about many of the same views Thoreau was espousing; again Cooper remains unknown (Taylor 2010:49).

Women still frequently write about the feelings of being marked as unfit, unworthy or unwelcomed in the wild. McConnell writes in her guide book, “we might suffer sidelong glances from men, and even some women, who think a woman’s place is indoors. We may even be flatly told that we aren’t strong enough, big enough, or tough enough.

*Enough.* The truth is, men are no better (or worse) equipped than women to survive in the wilderness” (2016: xiii-xiiii). McConnell speaks directly to the gendered expectation of domesticity of women and girls. Her position remains clear; in her book she explains, “there is no reason to assume that just because men and women are both capable of being in the wilderness, that the way in which they approach the experience will be any more similar than how they approach anything else in life” (McConnell 2016: xiv). Her guide book allows women to combat the “side glances” and the media’s muffled voices, encouraging women to get outside despite the social expectation of domesticity and disinterest in wilderness.

It took Suzanne Roberts 28 days on the John Muir Trail to come to the realization that her experience had been infected by a male perspective. Atop Half Dome in Yosemite, Suzanne suddenly understood that she had not conquered the mountains, but instead

learned to feel comfortable in them (Roberts 2012: 247). She found peace in her trip by proving to herself that she could do it. But she also became aware of her own positionality as a woman, “I wasn’t afraid of being out there, yet I was afraid of who might be out there with me, something I no doubt will have to navigate for the rest of my life,” she continued, “I suppose all women who want to go out into nature have to work through those fears, feelings that most men, and a few lucky women, never encounter” (Roberts 2012: 251). Like McConnell, Roberts recognizes how her gender has altered her experience, but she has not allowed it to restrict her.

A similar sentiment is echoed in *We’re in the Mountains Not Over the Hill: Tales and Tips From Seasoned Women Backpackers* by Susan Alcorn. Alcorn explains, “Backpacking, like most sports and outdoor activities, is dominated by men. And, though it is not a competitive sport in the sense that running a marathon is, it’s obvious that many participants (usually men) are greatly motivated by being first or being fastest. If we as women judge ourselves by male standards and measurements, we may conclude that we are somehow lacking,” she continues, “it is wiser to follow the examples provided by the women of this book who are motivated by personal goals... the first challenge is, therefore, to *set your own goals*” (Alcorn 2003: 226). This concept is repeated in various blogs, including that of Jack “Found” Haskell who proclaims, hike your own hike (HYOH). In their post, Haskell explains that success is attained in two ways: (1) achieving high social status and (2) achieving one’s goals (Haskell 2015). Haskell argues that the first definition is inherently wrong in hiking. Haskell claims that there needs to be a dismantlement of the cur-

rent hierarchy of hikers [(1) Thru hikers, (2) Section hikers, (3) Weekenders, (4) Day hikers]. We should not measure a hike, but rather experience our satisfaction. Haskell tells the reader multiple times to “write out your goals, then burn them. Let them go” (Haskell 2015). Setting a personal goal is crucial, for women especially, as it is impossible to find happiness and contentment by comparison to others.

While gender equality may call for fairness and a lack of distinction, physically each woman is different. The experience of wilderness is not only marked with our cultural history of gender but also restricted to an individual’s level of physical ability. It is critical to acknowledge that although there is a physical difference between male and female bodies, physical ability varies from individual to individual no matter their sex or gender identity; thus sex and gender are invalid forms of determining ability or fitness for outdoor activities. We must recognize that our physical ability has nothing to do with our performed gender and that physical capabilities are not determined solely by our sex chromosomes.

Womens’ experience of wilderness, however, are inherently different from men’s because we carry a cultural history that has thrust biases and prejudices upon us. A good example of this comes from a blog entitled, “Stop Telling Women Not to Go Into the Backcountry Alone” by Krista Langlois in which she compares her experience as a hiker in wilderness to her fear of being a woman in the frontcountry<sup>15</sup>. Langlois tells of her experience on a

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<sup>15</sup> Frontcountry is used in contrast to the backcountry, meaning not near a road or developed area. To put it simply, the frontcountry is not wilderness.

small island in Maine where from 7:00 p.m. to 3:00 a.m. she hunched over, knees to chest, as the most intense lightning storm she's ever experienced swirled around her. She remembered the look on the female ranger's face as she handed Langlois her permit at the permit office. She writes, "it's a look woman who venture into the wilderness alone often get. We get it from our parents, from society, from well-meaning people who issue back-country permits. They say it without saying it: *It's not safe out there. Not for you*" (Langlois 2016). She speaks to the experience of inferiority that many women battle with in both outdoor pursuits and in other daily aspects of life. But it is Langlois' confession that her most frightening nights were spent in the frontcountry that truly shatters all expectations. She describes nights in campgrounds where people in lit up RVs stared at her in her campsite; she dreaded the sounds of drunk men parked next to bonfires on a Forest Service road and the helpless feeling of just a nylon tent between you and all the terrifying possibilities of interaction with other people. She speaks of all the close calls she's had in urban settings: her boyfriend carrying her back to her dorm unconscious after being roofied, waking up topless to a man shining a flashlight over her body, and the countless times she, and other women, have experienced catcalls and other unwanted advances. She explains those experiences, "alone [are] enough to make me vigilant" (Langlois 2016).

It was once Langlois' belief that all these experiences, the terror, anxiety and concern were simply a part of being a woman. But she now explains, "They are not 'part of being a woman.' They're BULLSHIT" (Langlois 2016). She asserts that her preparedness in the wild makes her as capable as a man. Her experience and training, knowledge and vigi-

lance mean that she is in control. She describes her experience on that island in Maine as the good kind of fear, the kind that makes you more confident and stronger when it is over. But the fear in the frontcountry is uncalled for, something we cannot control, a feeling of helplessness that is unwarranted. She calls for people to, “Help us create a world that gives *more* women the confidence to be alone” (Langlois 2016). Her words are powerful and describe the difference between fear and concern. She separates the necessary backcountry preparation (with its power that comes from withstanding the wild) from the anxiety associated with simply being a woman in the frontcountry. These anxieties are sentiments frequently voiced by women in books, blogs and in response to my interview and survey questions.

In *Wild: From Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail*, Cheryl Strayed recounts her travels on the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT). She embarked on the journey with a cliché that many poke fun at, “to find herself.” She had lost her mother at a young age and spent time abusing drugs and herself. With freshly signed divorce papers and a new last name, Strayed, she took on the PCT. Her book is a reflection of her personal experience, both on the trail, and mentally and emotionally as she tackles some of her deepest seated issues. However, one brief exchange leaves Cheryl questioning her safety. Hiking through Oregon, she encounters two buck hunters. They are thirsty and rambunctious. She finds herself in a tough situation, also needing water, though only finding a swamp muck to try to filter for drinking. She helps the men with her filter, though it clogs. They decided to use iodine tablets to purify the water. Iodine tablets take thirty minutes to purify water. The

men begin to chat with Cheryl, commenting on her figure and asking why she is all alone, out in the woods. She begins to be uncomfortable and tells the men she must keep hiking to reach her camping destination. The men also decide to leave. She is still on edge and concerned. She feels alone and scared, “when they left, I stood for a while, letting the knot in my throat unclench. I was fine. I was in the clear. I was being a little bit silly. They’d been obnoxious and sexist and they’d ruined my water purifier, but they hadn’t done anything to me. They hadn’t meant harm. Some guys just didn’t know better” (Strayed 2012: 286) she explained. Shortly there after Cheryl decides to change and begin to settle there for the night. As she began to set up her tent one of the men returned, “... the sandy haired man reappeared. At the sight of him I knew that everything I’d felt before was correct. That I’d had a reason to be afraid. That he’d come back for me” (Strayed 2012: 286).

The man begins to harass her saying things like, “I thought you were heading on” (Strayed 2012: 286), “You tried to trick us,” (Strayed 2012: 286), “You changed your clothes too,” (Strayed 2012: 286), “I like your pants,” (Strayed 2012: 286) and “I’m talking about liking your pants, they look good on you. They show off your hips and legs” (Strayed 2012: 287). Cheryl combatted his advances, asking him not to say things like that before finally accepting the compliment and saying thank you in an attempt to pacify the man. She told him he better get going just as his hunting companion emerged and called for him. In departing the man said ominously, “You be careful out there” (Strayed 2012: 287). Cheryl describes her reaction, “I stood for a while the way I

had the first time they left, letting all the knots of fear unclench. Nothing had happened, I told myself. I am perfectly okay. He was just a creepy, horny, not-nice man, and now he is gone” (Strayed 2012: 288). She then proceeded to pack all her things and walked, “until walking became unbearable, until I believed I couldn’t walk even one more step. And then I ran” (Strayed 2012: 288).

Strayed’s experience paints a vivid image that, for many women, is not difficult to empathize with. The types of fear discussed by Langlois and Strayed are unfortunately daily occurrences for women. But as explained by McConnell in her guide book and by writers such as Corey Buhay and Rachel Zuer who penned “6 Myths About Women Hikers No One Should Believe” and Elisabeth Kwak-Hefferan, who wrote “18 Tips From Female Solo Hikers” (both in Backpacker Magazine), women can hike and backpack. Women are capable. Kwak-Hefferan compiled a list in which one woman mentions bringing mace while hiking alone for safety. Some mention learning to feel confident and comfortable with being alone, because you are just as safe, if not safer, walking alone in the woods, as in a big city. On the other hand, another hiker mentions camping at least a mile from the road because, “bad things happen because people come in cars” (Kwak-Hefferan n.d.). The most profound piece of the Kwak-Hefferan’s article, however, is the commentary by other female hikers on the stigma and assumptions about female hikers. Professional hiker Liz “Snorkel” Thomas explains, “Society has conditioned women to think they’re not supposed to be solo. There’s a stigma, but it’s really rewarding to hike alone” (Kwak-Hefferan n.d.). Another woman explains, “I think the fear of hiking alone is a cultural



thing for us. It has been ingrained in us since we were little to never do anything alone. Men don't really get that" (Kwak-Hefferan n.d.).

The list compiled by Buhay and Zuer attacks both the social stigma and the myths of physical danger. It begins with issues of menstruation, strength, emotions and illogical claims like "women don't like to get dirty" to which they argue, "Just. Plain. False" (Buhay and Zuer 2015). Ultimately, the human bodies are quite similar. Slight anatomical difference, and hormonal changes between men and women should not holistically deny women the right to complete the same tasks as men in the outdoors. All people are vulnerable to getting lost, injured or attacked in wild. That is just a fact. The things that make men and women different do not in any way make women unfit for outdoor experiences. The variation seen among the human population cannot be reduced to a dichotomy of male vs. female.

Recently, women are writing about their experiences, creating guide books to inspire others to engage in outdoor activities, and compiling lists to dismiss myths, stereotypes and stigma associated with female hikers and hiking. Their writing tends to be reflective in a manner different from men's writing, which is more heroic. Mike Quinne for example wrote about his experience of the American National Park system. His story, like *Strayed's*, and many others', begins with a personal struggle. Quinne uses poetic language to describe how his home-body lifestyle has contributed to the decay of his soul. At the end of a romantic relationship and the death of his grandfather he becomes motivated

to create a new level of self awareness and to effectively alter “his story.” He references the very common sense of feeling lost, and wanting to be found in nature. His memoir was written two years after his year long adventure in which he visited 50 National Parks. He romanticizes his memories, speaking specifically of hiking from Ansel Adam’s coveted Yosemite floor to John Muir’s range of light, the High Sierra. He concludes this entry by endorsing the National Park Service for their preservation efforts, “Well done America... good idea” (Quinne N.D.). His male voice champions the men of wilderness, Adams and Muir. He then celebrates the National Park Service holistically but omits gender; he addresses neither his male perspective nor the male dominance of the Park Service.

Quinne epitomizes the dominant male perspective associated with wilderness but also the underlying commonality of a spiritual journey of self awareness. While women contextualize their experience in their gender identity, men write as if gender does not matter. Men never speak of being a man in wilderness. Men do not speak to being concerned for their safety because they are men alone in the wild. This is male privilege.

Similarly, Bill Bryson’s *A Walk In The Woods* is filled with history and humor. Bryson describes his curiosity driven trip on the Appalachian Trail (AT) of the East Coast with his lovable but stupid pal Katz . Bryson frequently writes with a romantic air about the Appalachian Trail, “at the time of our hike, the Appalachian Trail was fifty-nine years old. That is, by American standards, incredibly venerable... it’s a miracle really” (Bryson 1998: 148-9). He reflects on his own safety and hiking alone, though he never mentions his own gender in these considerations. He is concerned about making it back to his car

not because he is a man, but rather because he is sure he has hypothermia. Bryson often discusses a fear of bears, a legitimate fear regardless of one's gender. Bryson, however, does include facts about the vulnerability of women on the trail when he speaks of a murder on the AT. Bryson's *A Walk In The Woods* incorporates positions of vulnerability through his thorough research and the historical contexts added to his personal journey. Although these two men include their own emotional vulnerability, and even mention the vulnerability of some others, they are unable to truly understand the subjective experience of women in the same place.

Additionally, while emotional trauma or a need to "find oneself" is frequently a motivating factor in these trips, when men choose to spend months in the wilderness they are pictured as having an adventurous spirit. They are heroic, such as, Chris McCandless, also known as Alexander Supertramp, of *Into the Wild* fame. Jon Krakauer's *Into the Wild* began as journalistic article after McCandless' body was discovered following his Magic School Bus adventure in Alaska. McCandless died after miscalculating the size of a river crossing and being stranded without food for an extended period of time in Alaska. He ingested poison from a plant he was attempting to eat. Krakauer was asked to turn his magazine article into a book due to the immense public curiosity. While McCandless was initially viewed by the public as a crazed man, he has now been deemed a hero. Last year dozens of "pilgrims" made their way to the abandoned school bus, and then needed to be rescued by local people and state troopers (Beaumont 2014). McCandless has become a

legendary figure like Muir and Thoreau. He is the romanticized rugged man. If McCandless were a woman, I doubt this would be the case.

Just this year, in the much anticipated television show *Gilmore Girls Revival*, *A Year In The Life*, Lorelei Gilmore decides on a whim that she is going to “do Wild” (referring to Strayed’s memoir *Wild*). In the episode, Gilmore, who herself is nowhere near competent in the outdoors, encounters hordes of women who are “doing Wild.” The women frantically ask one another, “book or movie” asking whether the women were inspired by the book written by Strayed or the film starring Reese Witherspoon. Gilmore of course was “doing the book;” the entire plot line is a satirical poke at the idea that women were somehow inspired to get outside to fulfill the cliché of “finding themselves.” These joking or subtle jabs at women in the outdoors are common and stand in stark contrast to the way we, as a society, treat men who choose to do the same activities, even for the same reasons.

### *Intersectionality*

To provide an intersectional analysis of wilderness access, it is critical to analyze my demographic survey data. My 194 respondents varied in age from 18 to 68. Most respondents self identified as Caucasian: 85.7% Caucasian, 7.4% Hispanic, 4.8% Asian, 3.7% Other, 1.1% Black, 0.5% Pacific Islander, 0% Native American. A recent article by Ryan Kearny, “White People Love Hiking. Minorities Don’t. Here’s Why,” explains that while

camping appears to be a cheap activity, “you may need to fly to your destination; otherwise, you'll need a car and a full tank of gas. A backpack, tent, and the necessary gear will run you at least \$1,000. And then you need some free time—which, if you work two jobs, you probably don't have. That may explain why 40 percent of outdoor participants come from households with incomes of \$75,000 or more, according to the Outdoor Foundation's report” (2016). This observation supports my survey data which reveal a preponderance of white hikers; it also supports my income data, which reflects class privilege. Respondents’ incomes vary from less than \$10,000 to greater than \$100,000 with 67% earning more than \$50,000 a year. Kearney uses an example of a Black teenager growing up Washington, D.C. and argues that statistically, this person is unlikely to have visited Shenandoah National Park due to economic and cultural barriers (2016). Because of lack of funds, there is a lack of desire or motivation to begin exploring wild places.

Glenn Nelson asks a critical question in his article “Why Are Our National Parks So White?” In the opening of his *New York Times* article he quotes Michelle Perry a 58-year-old, African-American woman: “The mountains are beautiful to watch” she paused for a moment and finished, “from a distance” (2016). Her detached perspective is indicative of many minority groups’ opinions of the natural world and National Parks in particular. The Park Service recorded 292.8 million visitors in 2014 (Nelson 2016) and the majority were older White people. Nelson argues that the future livelihood of the National Park Service is dependent on engaging and including minority groups, and this should happen soon. It has been projected by the Census Bureau that the United States will have a majority non-

White population by 2044 (Nelson 2016). The lack of involvement or even interest by non-White people is due to the racial and cultural history of this country.

Nelson contributes a story from his own childhood in one of the Rainier neighborhoods in Washington. He explains that his oldest friend, an African American boy, grew up to lead outings for the boy scouts when the two were in college. He mentions the joking banter about finding “White’s only” signs at entrances and jokes about being lynched or attacked while collecting firewood (Nelson 2016). These jokes are a lived reality for minority groups. This is one reason why there is resistance by people of color to visiting National Parks and recreational areas. The Park Service itself is composed of 80% White people (Nelson 2016) and less than 12% of environmental leadership positions are held by minorities (Nelson 2016). It is a hostile place for non-White people, and the established institutions have historically done very little to alter that reality.

This concept of racial exclusivity connects to Kerry Mitchell’s belief that hiking in these parks is deeply rooted in the White tradition of visiting natural places that are representative of American history and identity (2016: 13-16). These traditions romanticize the practices of White coloniality and the environmental exploitation of nature tourism.

White Americans love camping and hiking because they: (1) are privileged by both racial and class hierarchies to spend time and money outdoors and (2) feel a connection to the imagined and romanticized tradition of the rugged White American wilderness. This is a good example of the ways in which intersectionality affects access to outdoor space. One

must have both class privilege and White privilege, and in most cases, the privilege of being male.

The religious identities of my respondents are also important to analyze. They directly reflect the research of both Mitchell and the 2012 PEW Survey on Religion. In the 2012 PEW Survey “‘Nones’ on the Rise: One-in-Five Adults Have No Religious Affiliation” found that 23% of American identified as ‘spiritual but not religious.’ Mitchell explores this notion of spirituality in *Spirituality and the State: Managing Nature and Experience in American’s National Park* (2016). Mitchell explains that in his research, hikers choosing the term spiritual rather religious is indicative of a particular social and cultural location. He mentions, “religious liberalism and liberal Protestantism have been associated with affluence, relatively high levels of education, and whiteness” (Mitchell 2016: 64).

This observation is supported by my sample. Religious identities of my respondents is as follows: 25.4% identify as spiritual but not religious, 20.6% Christian, 15.3% do not have a religious identity, 14.3% are Atheist, 9.5% Catholic, 9.5% Agnostic, 4.8% chose other, 3.2% Buddhist, 2.1% identify as Jewish, 1.1% do not know, 0.5 Hindu and 0.0% Muslim. In total, 66% do not identify with a religious belief system and would fall into the ‘Nones’ described by the PEW survey.

Wholly, the demographics collected in the online survey reflect a dominance of White, upper class, non-religious hikers. Note who is not hiking; people of color with low in-

comes who identify with traditional religions. It is important to acknowledge that the ways in which an individual is intersectionally positioned would likely hinder their ability or desire to access the American Wilderness.

*Survey Data: Commentary on Gender*

**“So I chose to tell myself a different story from the one women are told. I decided I was safe. I was strong. I was brave. Nothing could vanquish me.” -Cheryl Strayed (2012: 51).**

Of 194 survey responses, 64.1% identified as female. When I asked the surveyed women if they felt comfortable hiking alone, 68.6% responded yes, 23.4% no. Those who responded gave varied responses as to why they do not feel comfortable hiking alone. Respondents explained that they do not hike alone for a variety of reasons including a fear of injury or encounters with wild animals. But, the most prominent response related to personal safety was fear of attack by men. One woman explained, “I’m female and could be attacked by someone wanting to do me harm.” Another explained, “...because men you encounter may not be safe.” Some reflected on personal experience, “I was once stalked on the AT by a creepy man. Ugh!” Others echoed concerns that are not limited to the wild, and instead refer to simply being a woman, “I do generally feel safer in the backcountry than in cities, but unfortunately there are still guys who think a female by herself is an invitation to whatever.” Others repeated similar sentiments, “Sometimes there are weird men or men dressed in non-hiking clothes. I’m NOT afraid of bears or other animals, just some male humans due to rape or female hate.” And in some cases the reason a woman does hike alone it is as simple as, “Because I am a woman.”



Safety was a prominent response among those who choose not to hike alone, and also remains a concern for those who do hike alone. One woman mentioned, “I have experience, pink pepper spray and my resting bitch face.” These responses echo investigation into the National Park Service and sexual assault on female park rangers. In “Out Here, No One Can Hear You Scream: The dangerous culture of male entitlement and sexual hostility hiding within America’s national parks and forests,” Joyce reveals the struggle of combatting sexual harassment and assault on female employees (2016). In *Strayed’s Wild*, the most anxiety producing moment, both in the book and film is Cheryl’s encounter with a drunk hunter who stalks her after having said he left. The reality is that it is not being alone in the woods that frightens these women, but rather not knowing who may be there with you.

When asked, “In what ways and why do you feel your gender identity affects your experience of the natural world?” one respondent explained, “As a woman, I feel I am much less safe alone in an isolated location than I would be if I were male.” Another explains, “People are concerned about my safety when I say that I hike alone, and I suspect it is because I identify as female.” Another woman explains:

“I try to keep any risks in perspective that something bad happening to me is just as likely to happen walking to my car at night after work as it is alone on the trail. But all my friends and family know that I hike a lot, and sometimes alone, and they always tell me they are worried about me and will send me articles about female hikers that were assaulted or killed while hiking.”

The responsibility to avoid the problem of male assault is thrust upon women. The logic that they should avoid hiking alone because it is unsafe frames them as complacent. Furthermore, this reinforces the belief that women are lesser, weaker, unprepared or ill-equipped to survive not only human danger but all danger in the wild. Regarding attacks, by framing women as the problem (whether it be in a public place where she is “wearing too little” or “drinking too much” or hiking alone in the backcountry which is “a place for men”), women bear a portion of the blame simply for being in the “wrong” place at the “wrong” time. Women should not be blamed for an attack or expected to avoid a place because it is dangerous. Instead those dangerous places (where the danger is other human beings) should be rethought. The danger is avoidable, not by not going there, but by recognizing that these attacks are enacted by bad people who exist both in a dark alley and hidden in the backcountry. And, the real dangers of the wild: injury, animals, and accidents, are not gendered. No animal, be it a bear, mountain lion or snake would care if the person they are attacking, stalking, or biting is male or female. Yet still, sex and gender are the default explanations of dangerous situations; one respondent explains, “people don’t expect me to know what I am doing or be ‘strong’ or as ‘capable’ because I’m a woman.”

And yet when given an opportunity to tell me anything they wanted me to know about their experience of nature, these individuals responded, “Hiking has changed everything about my life. The way I look at life, the way I deal with stress, the way I accept and interact with people.” Themes that surfaced in this question include, hiking as a spiritual

experience, hiking as transformative, healing or restorative of body and mind, hiking as liberating and empowering, nature as a place of home or belonging, hiking as a lifestyle and addiction, wilderness as passion, nature as humbling, a deep respect for nature, a longing for more respect for our planet and a desire for more people to go out, or have access to the wild. Hiking proves to be incredibly rewarding; terms like liberating, empowering, freeing, healing and humbling are frequently used. Responses included, “I believe in looking for beauty everywhere I go,” “love wilderness,” and “after the first time I knew it was going to be a lifestyle.” These responses reflect a passion, joy and freedom despite the fears and concerns voiced by these individuals.

#### *Interviews: Women's Voices*

My twenty interview respondents ranged in age from 23 to 57 years old. All twenty individuals identified as female. Seventeen of these women identified as White/Caucasian (82%), one identified as Asian American, one identified as Latina and one identified as Other (Appalachian Melungeon). These individuals spanned several states including: California (4), Oregon (4), Washington (3), Arizona (1), Colorado (1), Connecticut (1), Idaho (1), Oklahoma (1), South Carolina (1), Virginia (1), Nevada (1) and one individual claimed the Northwest as their home. Religious identities varied, although “Nones” were

predominant<sup>16</sup> with 65% percent of respondents claiming no religious affiliation. Three are Catholic (17%), one is Christian, one is Pagan and one identified as spiritual.

These women cited a variety of motivations for hiking. Some describe freedom, liberation, relief, rejuvenation, healing and peace while others may cite activity, exhaustion, meditation, sweat and strain. Though more often than not, it is cited as a necessity for mental and emotional health, a practice that is both empowering and strengthening for the physical body, mind and spirit. Individuals mention, “It give me a lot of energy,” “it’s a therapeutic exercise... it gives me time to think about stuff and get away from everything,” and “it’s like my body is craving to be away and outside. The air is different.”

Women connect with the natural world in positive ways. For some it is a freedom from societal pressures, an anti-space that removes the pervasive social categories of sex, age, class, race, etc. (Turner 1969). In an interview with Emily (The Tattooed Emu<sup>17</sup>), she explained:

“Wilderness is the great equalizer. As a female hiker myself, I am what you call, ‘on the curvy side’ and even though I am on the curvy side what segregates me in real life is a moot point in the wilderness. What matters is, can I get up this incline? Can I sustain this speed? Can I get to where I am going? And someone who wears a size 2 may not be able to do what I can do. And I have seen that happen... what it comes down to is do you

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<sup>16</sup> “Nones” refers to individuals who claim to have no religious identity. For the US, the number of “Nones” is steadily increasing; the most recent Pew Survey on Religion shows that 23% of American claim no religious identity (2015). This number is higher in western states such as California (27%), Oregon (31%) and Washington (32%); 70% of my respondents reside in the Western States.

<sup>17</sup> Emily’s trail name

believe what society is telling you, or do you believe what your body is telling you?”

She describes becoming empowered when hiking. It is a spiritual experience, a stress reliever, an anxiety reducer and a place of personal reflection. And as a self-identified feminist, Emily still cannot abandon her upbringing. Raised in South Carolina, she was taught never to hike alone:

“I do not hike alone, I have never hiked alone. I was raised in South Carolina and I was raised in a culture that is very, that puts an emphasis on manliness, and women shouldn’t do such things alone, that is very much my hiking persona still, because I grew up constantly hearing don’t go hiking alone, don’t go backpacking alone, not only as a woman, but as a protection thing, if something happens you are going to want someone with you, all the better male, and by male I mean biologically.”

Emily was taught traditional gender binaries which are prominent not only in the South where she grew up, but throughout American culture. How do these expectations of gender performance affect women’s interaction with the wild? Some women cited a fear of getting lost, or injured. These responses mirror those in my online survey. Emily’s experience is not isolated, although many of the women I spoke to reject these cultural teachings. I purposefully chose to interview female hikers, meaning I selected for a people who have overcome restrictive categories of gender and gendered space.

57% of the women I interviewed said they do not hike alone, and 15% said they rarely hike alone or will sometimes hike alone; 14 of my 20 respondents (70%) said they feel

comfortable hiking alone. These women describe feeling competent and cite their only hesitation as unavoidable risks such as injury and animals and other people. Their preparation helped mitigate most of their fears. Again, the interview data echoes the responses in the online survey. Women fear other people; their vulnerable position as women in society is carried to the wilderness. However, over half the women who did not hike alone or rarely hike alone crave the community associated with hiking with others.

In another case, Abby mentions:

“I don’t love camping alone, that distinction is important, hiking alone during the day is totally fine for me, if not preferable. Camping alone is lonely, cooking or setting up the tent alone, there’s scary monsters in the dark. But hiking alone as a woman, I’m an athletic confident outdoors woman, I take joy and pride in that, my speed and strength would get me out of a dangerous situation if one happens. If there’s something sketchy I wait for another person, like a creek crossing or a rattle snake...”

Abby mentions the companionship of camping with another person. Many women start hiking and backpacking through online hiking groups. Women Who Hike, founded by Nicole Brown and Savannah Coble, has worked to create a community for women to unite together in outdoor pursuits. What was once a small group with an instagram page has become a large organization with regional groups and ambassadors who lead group hikes and other adventurous activities. Women Who Hike highlights the accomplishments of female hikers and cultivates a community for women looking for hiking and camping comrades. This is a common theme for many women. Two interviewees mention, “one of the things, for me, about hiking is the social experience, even in silence you are still with someone, you get to see and experience these things with others. You can share them. We

will have a better time than going by myself,” and “I think... I enjoy hiking with other people. I would rather experience hiking with other people... I am definitely an extrovert and don't need to be on my own to feel nature and feel the experience of it.”

No matter if women choose to hike alone or with others, gender is still an aspect of identity that affects the experience of wilderness. When asked how she felt about her own gender identity affecting her experience of wilderness, Emily (the Tattooed Emu) replied:

“I don't want to use the term civilized or settled, but the way the US developed the West, westward expansion and the emphasis on civilization, taming, aggregation, building, plowing... the West was a wild untamed land of possibility. It was a fresh start full of potential. So, we expanded westward and then wilderness writers pop up, John Muir. Here's John Muir who jumps over his fence with a loaf of bread, a block of cheese and a wool blanket going to hangout in the wilderness. You have Jack London writing about Alaska and projecting this sort of idea that only a man's man can survive in the wilderness. That man's man can be seen in folklore, Davey Crocket, Paul Bunyan, masculinity is projected on wilderness. Wilderness is socially constructed, because there is no wilderness in the US, all wild is managed.”

She paused for a moment then finished:

“How do you reconcile the innate femininity of the Earth with the innate masculinity of wilderness? Do women feel more at home in non-wilderness areas and places that have been domesticated? Women are allowed to be comfortable in a landscape that is domesticated and dominated by men because that is safe and accepted.”

Many female hikers are aware of the gender dichotomy. Some interviewees mention the media associating men with wilderness, an observation I described in an earlier section. Interviewees often underline the cultural assumptions about women, such as “in a lot of situations as a female you feel less capable and... it's not true.” Another woman men-

tions, “the reason I sometimes don’t hike alone is because I don’t know who is going to be there, if I don’t feel comfortable I don’t go, but I am more afraid of other people, I don’t think a coyote can tell if I am a woman...”

Other women narrate their negative experiences, similar to Jurenas: “you get looks, even hiking with other women, you get looks from male hikers, they question us and I’ve never gone overnight, and I feel like my experience as a woman will negatively impact that.” When asked if race affects positively or negatively their experience of wilderness another interviewee explains, “I’d like to say no, but I think it does, especially when I do urban hiking,” she mentioned feeling as though people do not speak to her as frequently when she hikes alone compared to when hiking with a Caucasian friend.

Gender identity is intertwined with other aspects of identity. Our identities are complex and intersectional. In an interview with Eugene local turned Pacific Crest Trail hiker, Pink Panther, she explained the ways in which her intersectional identity, as both a woman and a person of size, has altered her experience,

“I’ve always been the kind of person who struggled with weight and overcame that rather than gender issues. Other people have made a big deal about my hike, but I was wondering why isn’t it a bigger deal that I’m 240 pounds? I thought that would be what people were worried about. But I’ve never lived in fear, not that I’ve never been afraid, but I do it even if I am scared, because its important to live life, I want to be like I lived as hard, as full, as awesome a life as I could on my death bed. Like there are movies where the woman is 60 and never did anything and I don’t want to be that person. I want to live my life to the fullest and say I saw the world, I hiked the PCT. Gender factors in for others, but I don’t let it keep me from anything, that’s how society defines me.”



Pink Panther had not expected gender to be the main factor in discrimination against her, because a plus sized woman, her weight had always been more important than her gender.

Race also plays a large role in the level of accessibility an individual has with wilderness. 85% of my interview participants identify as Caucasian/White. As explained in an earlier section, wilderness is frequently a predominantly White space. For the women of color that I spoke to, race played a factor in their experience of wilderness. One self identified Asian-American became more aware of her intersectional identity after moving: “In Colorado I was shocked and surprised... I definitely had a sense of, ‘I am the only Asian American person here,’ and then I hike in California, this is crazy half the people aren’t White... it’s noticeable on the trails. As far as long distance [hiking] after Colorado I was more conscious of it, the stereotype of White dude, 20 something...”

In another interview, Chicana Alice Herrera explained, “I would like to think it [race] doesn’t [affect my interactions with or in wilderness], but I sometimes feel it does in a negative sense. I get acknowledged less compared to white friends.” Personal interactions, as well as the presence of signs or symbols of oppression and discursive white supremacist agendas affected Alice. She explained, “for example, I went to Bryce Canyon [National Park] and some kid was wearing a Trump hat, as a Person of Color, in that space it made me feel uncomfortable.”

And while the majority of the women I spoke with identify as Caucasian/White, they are aware of the lack of diversity and their own privilege as white people in wilderness. Lauren Austin explained, “I recognize it is a huge privilege to get to the backcountry, a white privilege, a white person thing. I have some guilt, but I cannot help who I am or the skin I was born into. I am thrilled to share the outdoors with non-white friends, and it’s pretty cool to take them out.” She then shared, “I took a group of students from Hong Kong camping and they had never slept outside. These were athletic people, but this was their first evening outside and there was a clear sky covered in stars. They had never seen so many stars. It was their first experience with it. It was powerful.” She continued, “it’s an issue that the backcountry, wilderness, outdoors are limited to people who have White privilege.”

Others mention, “I have the benefit of growing up in a white middle class family that made me learn to like the outdoors... I feel lucky,” “there a lot of white people hiking and the only reason I am thinking about hiking is because I had a comfortable up-brining,” and “I am privileged, my perceived race, and my parents have given me the money to drive and acquire gear. I can afford to take time off to go out and interact with nature.” The same interview continues, connecting the intersection of race and class, “if I were from a lower class I would not be able to do it, but I think class and race are deeply connected.”

In some instances women cited their gender as a means for being closer to nature. For

Abby, a John Muir Trail hiker, her gender alters her experience in an unnamed way. She explains:

“Women interact with nature differently than men and I’m part of that. There’s a sort of Gaia Earth Mother thing, I don’t know how spoken it is or outwardly recognizable, it’s kind of like a feminine wild spirit that I think it, I have that is different than men. But I have never been a man, so I don’t know what they are feeling in the wilderness. I think there is something there, that may be subconscious or not completely easily identifiable, that affects how women and men interact with nature. I feel like there is some sort of, there’s an answer, but I don’t know it.”

Another woman mirrors Abby’s thoughts in mentioning Mother Earth and the stereotypical nurturing qualities women are associated with. Another explains that she does not reject her femininity to exist in a masculine space, “my feminine nature does disappear when I am outside... it is a preservational skill to learned to react to people, to speak with them with a feminine outlook... I am still a girl when I am out there, it is very strange... how I alter— ...my gender identity does change.”

But still other recognize their own bias, as one woman explains that being a woman, “Probably in some way informs the way I interact with the world, but I have not experienced life as a man. I cannot compare it,” she clarifies that gender is “probably [affected] a little bit, but I also see my dad in outdoors and my dad has similar responses to the peaks. I think this transcends gender.”

Each of these women discusses their own individual perspective. Each has a different vision that collectively builds into a partially shared reality. Many women shared with me

why wilderness and engaging with the natural world through hiking, backpacking and outdoor pursuits helped better their mental, emotional and/or physical health. Their ability to access these spaces is crucial to these transformative experiences. Juliana Jurenas told me, “Hiking has become therapeutic and meditative for me... since moving to Los Angeles I have no family around me, outside became my family,” she then realized, “I never thought about that, when I didn’t have family near by I turned to outside for family.” It is experiences such as this that epitomize the importance of access to this space.

Concerns about diverse access such as Alice Herrera’s are vital; “I wish hiking spaces and backpacking spaces felt more inclusive.” It is critical that we work to dismantle the system of gender binaries plus white privilege. In creating rigid classifications we, as a society, restrict individuals in personal growth, and the full exploration of identity.

By deconstructing our biased patriarchal and racist cultural history we can recognize the falsehoods embedded in our cultural “truth” and engage with the realities of a diversities of perspectives, experiences and identities.

Finally, I want to include my own personal voice. As mentioned earlier, hiking has always been a crucial aspect of my own identity. I have spent my life outdoors, collecting rocks, watching clouds, and walking steadily up mountainsides to reach a peak. My life has been rooted in wilderness. I have hiked my way through the tough years of adolescence, the pain of heartbreak, the emptiness of loss, the frustration of graduate school and

the joy of happiness and love. I have found myself in wilderness, a little bit at a time. When I hear things like, “it would be hard to imagine my life without hiking,” I understand. I have been given the incredible privilege to conduct this research with profound women who will continue to climb peaks, get lost and wander through the woods. In sharing their stories, their experiences and ultimately, their desire for a more diverse and inclusive wild space, I hope I can engage a larger population with these issues.

### *Reciprocal Ethnography*

To attempt to avoid personal bias in interpretation and presentation I conducted reciprocal ethnography. All interviewees were asked if they would be interested in reviewing the final analysis. Those who were interested and who agreed to be contacted again were given an earlier draft of this thesis. That draft included full analysis and quotes. Interviewees were asked to answer five questions<sup>18</sup> concerning my interpretation, presentation, and representation of them.

Of the twenty women I interviewed, seventeen were contacted for reciprocal ethnography. Five of these women responded, 25% of the interview population. Of those five women, all five agreed with my interpretation. Juliana Jurenas explained:

“It's telling the whole truth...for once. Your work is a rarity in my eyes; you found countless women with similar experiences who are forging through nature despite the criticism from the all too comfortable male gender. Because of the repetition in experiences, it is unlike

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<sup>18</sup> Questions used in the reciprocal ethnography are in APPENDIX C.

anything I've read on the subject. You brought these women together in one analysis which brings this topic to a whole new validity.”

Alice Herrera explained, “Reading your work got me to think of other experiences I’ve had outdoors. I appreciate your work. It is important, and I am excited to see where you take it!”

But this work also allowed for recognition of my own limits as a subjective person. For example regarding American cultural values, Alice also explained:

“Consider, who is included in the understanding/conceptualization of American culture. You point out the critiques of Ortner and [Rosaldo] as essentializing women’s experiences when race, class, etc. make that inaccurate. I know your focus for this work is gender, but acknowledging this same shortcoming in the generalization of American culture and values would be useful [and] appreciated.”

Furthermore, Ruby McConnell suggested a greater diversity of female writers be included, “I would have liked to see a more broad presentation of female voices in the beginning discussion— more of a bridge from the male-dominated view to now.” And finally,

Emily Knott clarified her perspective:

“you write, ‘Emily’s experience is not isolated, though many of the women I spoke to reject these cultural teachings.’ You are correct—I haven’t quite conquered this cultural teaching; however, I do recognize that it’s illogical...Not hiking alone because I hear my mother’s voice in the back of my head going, “that’s dangerous,” is not logical and it shouldn’t be enough to keep me off the trails by myself, but for whatever reason it does.... it’s a work in progress, a de-programming of a standard.”

Reciprocal Ethnography is invaluable to this project as it not only provides a greater level of insight into my respondents' stories but also brings my own biases and positionalities to the surface. Allowing these individuals more control over the representation of themselves is important to me. My singular vision should not overwhelm theirs. This process has been both fruitful and encouraging.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

American wilderness is a foundational aspect of the American spirit: rugged individualism inspired by wilderness remains a prominent part of American culture. It is very American to spend a weekend hiking, driving to visit a national park, or taking a summer camping trip. As evident in literature and art, wilderness has proven to be a place of relaxation, rejuvenation, and inspiration for generations of people. Much of our literature, poetry, art and traditions emerged out of the pioneers' spirit in the "unexplored" lands of North America. However, the gendered nation of American wilderness deserves deeper analysis.

The construction of gender has created a dichotomy in which biological sex determines our behavior, inclinations and expectations. Women have been victims of these gender expectations. Their access to wilderness is limited due to the construction of gendered spaces that are coded as masculine. The foundations of this nation lie in the privilege of white men to conquer lands and peoples. As the young country blossomed into a dynamic and powerful nation, the ideology of American individualism, exceptionalism, and expansion tinged our cultural values and practices. The binary gender system has seeped into our cultural values and practices to gender actions and spaces. Wilderness and hiking have been established as masculine, systematically excluding women through cultural monitoring and enforcement. Even today the assumption that women are less fit, or in more danger in the woods than a man is openly expressed by both men and women.



It is critical that as a country we become aware of the ways in which the sex/gender system limits expectations for categories of people. Women are restricted to domestic roles, being bound to emotional vulnerability in which we are deemed weak and unfit. Men are tethered to the ideas of masculinity in which they must remain emotionless, strong, and independent. This strict dichotomy between masculine and feminine must be acknowledged as false. Biologically male and female individuals are more alike as human beings than different. Chromosomes play no role in brain development. Instead, we must acknowledge the problematic nature of our restrictive cultural values and take the steps to overcome them.

My work shows that wilderness for many people is a place for personal growth, physical health, emotional healing and community building. Female respondents reveal wilderness is an overwhelmingly positive experience. These women told me about how profoundly transformative hiking has been regarding their mental and emotional health. Some explained that hiking became a means of bonding with other women. And the positive physical results of hiking are undeniable.

Tragically, we have allowed the divisive categories of gender, race and class to restrict access to wilderness. Thus, we must encourage a more diverse population to explore and adventure outside. Historically, wilderness is a privileged space, one in which White men have dominated. It is time to acknowledge the wonder and beauty of natural space, its benefits to the human body and spirit and erase restrictions to access. This means a dra-

matic restructuring of our historical conceptions of space. This means acknowledging the assumptions, stereotypes and tropes present in popular culture. This mean creating programs that teach young people of all colors, genders and classes that nature is wonderful. The goal of this project was simple: to analyze gender bias in the wilderness. But this project speaks to a larger issue of environmental protection, access and inclusion. It is my hope that my work will cause readers to think critically about the ways gender and space have been constructed.

Over the course of this project I have heard many stories of persistence, fear, strength and empowerment. I have myself learned about my own biases and privileges. But I think it was Ruby McConnell who said it best, when she explained, “The female outdoor experience is both unique and valid.” All experiences are unique— individuals have diverse and intersectional identities that carry with them cultural expectations, biases and privileges. It is imperative that we recognize the importance of acknowledging other people’s experiences that are different from our own; there is no singular vision, no absolute truth, only a multitude of visions that create our tethered reality.

**“The female outdoor experience is both unique and valid.” -Ruby McConnell**

## APPENDIX A

### SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

- What is your age?  
What is your race?  
Where is your hometown?  
What is your household income?  
What is your occupation?  
What (if any) is your religious identity?  
Did you grow up hiking/camping/backpacking?  
Have you completed a thru hike or a long backpacking trip?  
    Where?  
    Did you thru hike or section hike?  
    Was this your first long term hike?  
    How were you able to complete this hike? Did you take vacation from work/  
    school?  
Where do you typically hike?  
How long was your longest hike?  
What motivates you to hike?  
What is your knowledge of the trail? How much time do you spend planning a hike?  
Describe your relationship with nature.  
What is wilderness and what does the word mean to you?  
Do you consider wilderness sites special?  
    What makes wilderness sites special to you?  
Describe your emotions or states of being on a trail and how that compares with ordinary/  
    everyday life.  
Do you consider nature/wilderness to be healing?  
    Why?  
Describe the difference (if you believe there to be one) between nature and wilderness.  
Do you meet people while hiking?  
Do you talk to people you meet?  
    Do they share experiences?  
    Are they similar to your experiences?  
Do you consider yourself spiritual?  
Would you describe hiking as healing?  
    Please describe how hiking is healing.  
What is your perception of female hikers?  
What if your gender identity?  
Do you hike alone?  
Do you feel comfortable hiking alone?  
    Why?/Why not?  
Do people worry about you hiking alone?

Do you feel your gender identity affects your interaction with nature/the wild?

In what ways and why do you feel your gender identity affects your interactions with nature/ the wild?

If you could tell me one thing about your experience what would it be?

## APPENDIX B

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

Age:

Race:

Home Town:

Occupation

Religious Identity:

Gender Identity:

How would you like to be referred to (name, pseudonym, a participant) :

How frequently do you hike and/or backpack? Why?

How are you able to hike and/or backpack? (i.e. do you use vacation time for your job?

Do you utilize breaks off school? Is it a daily practice you schedule?)

What motivated you to hike?

How prepared are you typically when hiking and/or backpacking? (i.e. do you spend time mapping out your trip? Do you plan meals? Do you read guide books?)

What is your relationships with hiking?

Please describe some words and concepts that you associate with hiking

What is nature/wilderness to you?

What do the terms nature and wilderness mean to you?

What makes wilderness sites special to you if you consider them special?

Why do you travel to the wilderness?

Describe your emotions and states of being on the trail and how they compare with “ordinary life.”

Do you consider yourself spiritual? If so where do you go and what do you do to practice or express your spirituality?

Do you hike alone? If so do you feel comfortable? If not why not?

Do people worry or question you about hiking alone?

Do you feel your religious identity affects (positively or negatively) your interactions with nature or the wild? If so how?

Do you feel your gender identity affects (positively or negatively) your interactions with nature or the wild? If so how?

Do you feel your ethnic or racial identity in any way (positively or negatively) alters your interaction or ability to interact with nature or the wild?

Do you believe there is any aspect of your identity that alters (positively or negatively) your interaction with nature or the wild?

Have you met people along the trail? Talked to them? Had similar experiences? Describe them.

What is your favorite hiking story?

If there was one thing about your experience you want me to know, what would that be?

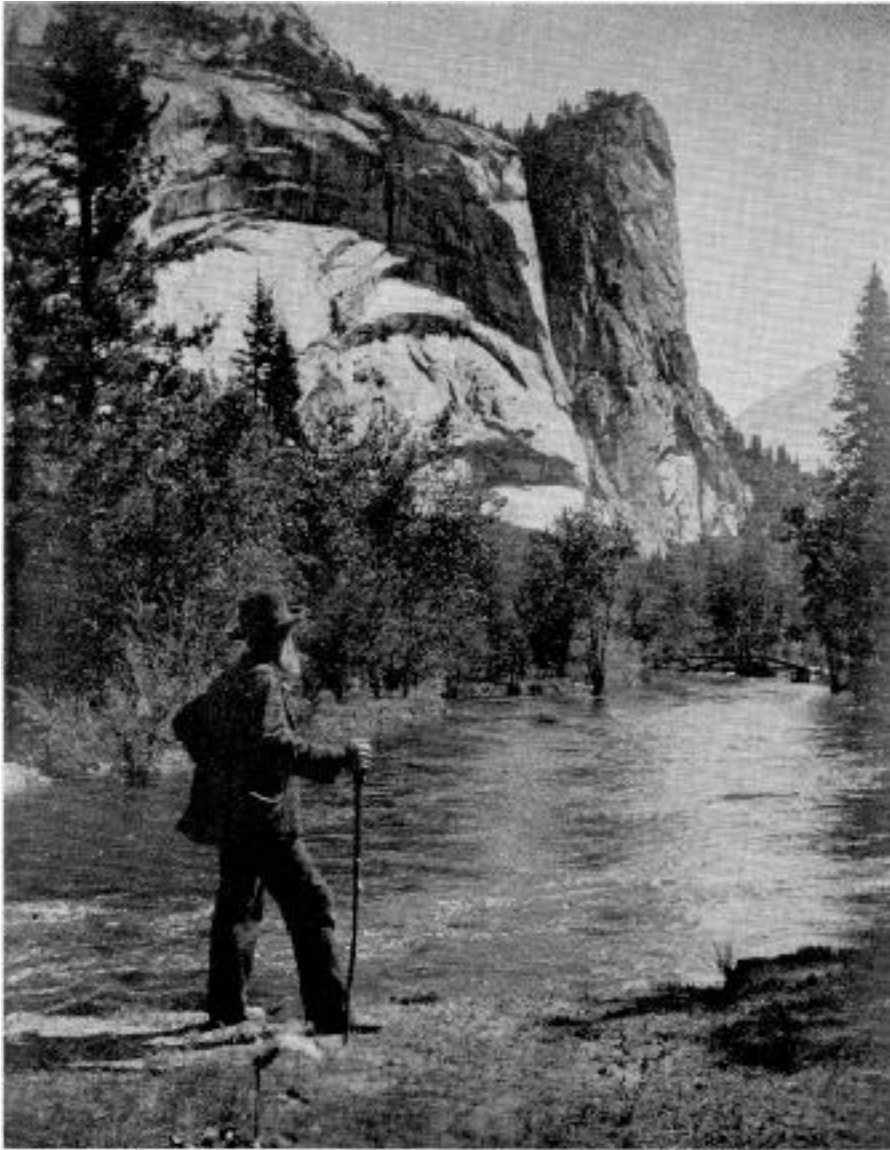
## APPENDIX C

### RECIPROCAL ETHNOGRAPHY

#### QUESTIONNAIRE

- 1) Do you believe yourself to be accurately represented in this work?
- 2) Do you agree with the interpretation and/or presentation of this work?
- 3) Are there any specific instances in which you recognize yourself but feel as though you were not given the credit you would have liked? (Please be specific so I can rectify the instance)
- 4) What is your overall impression of this work?
- 5) Do you have any other questions or comments?

## FIGURES



**Figure 1. John Muir in Yosemite National Park**

Photo courtesy of the National Park Service



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