Steven J. Holmes, "Some Lives and Some Theories," in *Identity and the Natural Environment: The Psychological Significance of Nature,* ed. Susan Clayton and Susan Opotow, Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2003

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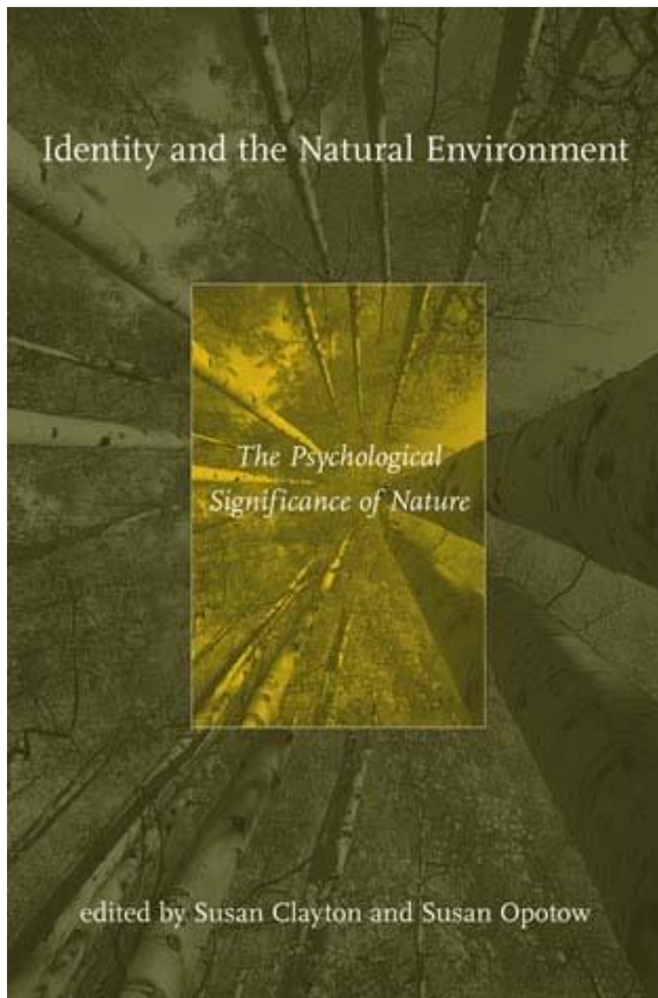

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Some Lives and Some Theories

Steven J. Holmes

The chapters in this volume take their place in a broad context, one that extends beyond environmental professionals to a variety of fields in the humanities and social sciences, and to the lived experiences of people. Indeed, significant experiences in and of the natural world appear regularly in the life stories of individuals from all walks of life, in informal personal reminiscences and storytelling, as well as in more formal literary and biographical works. Here I review some of the approaches through which the intersections of identity and the natural world have been explored by scholars and by writers, emphasizing the implicit dialogue between scholarly study and actual lives that is one of the hallmarks of this field. Without claiming to offer a comprehensive survey, I discuss relevant scholarship and life writing under three headings:

- *Developmental and psychoanalytic perspectives*, including the early work of Edith Cobb and Harold Searles, as well as more recent scholarship;
- *Place theory*, as formulated in humanistic geography and environmental psychology; and
- *The links among identity, ethics, and action*, including reflections by deep ecologists, phenomenological philosophers, and ecopsychologists.

I conclude by noting briefly what seem to me to be some of the most important continuing questions and challenges of the field, some of which are addressed by the following chapters in this book.

Developmental and Psychoanalytic Perspectives

Katy Payne, a wildlife biologist and writer, grew up surrounded by the broad fields and steep gorges of the Finger Lakes region of central New

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York. Raised on a family farm and taught by *The Jungle Books*, *The Wind in the Willows*, and her father's self-created Johnny Possum stories that she was "of one blood" with the animals, her most powerful early identity was forged in close relationship with the natural world:

> I remember my first encounter with myself, on a high day in later summer. Standing alone in a field where wildness crowded up yellow and green against our garden and house, I said out loud, "This is the happiest day of my life and I'm eleven." I raised my skinny arms to the blue sky and noticed them, and my ragged cuffs, and a mass of golden flowers that was hanging over me. Their color against the sky made my heart leap. Since then I have seen the same yellows, green, and blue in Van Gogh's harvest paintings and heard the same hurrahing in Hopkins's harvest poems, but my hurrahing, that made me inside out with exuberance, was for wildness. (Payne, 1998, pp. 38–39)

Payne's hurrah for wildness led her to a career studying the communication of whales and elephants and using that knowledge to better shape human interaction with these species. Having settled back into her home range around Ithaca after various personal and professional sojourns away, her present life and identity continue to be shaped by the intimate and energetic relationship with the natural world forged in her childhood.

Payne's experiences resonate in the lives and memories of many individuals, past and present, in the United States and across the globe. Reflecting this common experience, the study of childhood development has constituted one of the major avenues through which the natural world has entered into scholarly discussions of selfhood and identity. That this is so undoubtedly reveals the long shadow of William Wordsworth, whose Romantic formulation of the child's special capacities for perception and creativity in nature has infused Western culture for the past two centuries (Chawla, 1994, 2002).

In work beginning in the late 1950s, Edith Cobb (1977) found Wordsworth's basic conception of the child's creative interaction with the world (especially nature) echoed in the autobiographical reminiscences of a wide range of writers and artists. These often highlight the child's experience of "a revelatory sense of continuity—an immersion of his whole organism in the outer world of forms, colors, and motions in unparticularized time and space" (Cobb 1997, p. 88). Such experiences reflect "an aesthetic logic present in both nature's formative processes and the gestalt-making powers and sensibilities of the child's own devel-

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oping nervous system. Inner and outer worlds are sensed as one in these moments of form-creating expansion and self-consciousness" (p. 110), providing grounds both for a childhood sense of identity and for the adult's capacities for artistic creativity. On the one hand, of course, this emphasis on an ideal unity of self and world based in childhood experience can (and should) be criticized as itself a cultural and historical construction, applicable to specific times, cultures, and groups of people, but by no means an objective description of universal reality. (As one element of such a critique, Chawla, 1990, suggests that Cobb's analysis is applicable only to the creative artists and writers who were her subjects, not to persons who ended up in other careers as adults.) On the other hand, the insight and power of these Wordsworthian beginnings have led psychological theorists and researchers to more nuanced explorations of childhood environmental experiences and the impact of those experiences on adult identity.

In perhaps the most sustained and insightful psychoanalytic treatment of the human relationship with nature, Harold Searles (1960) uses the theory of ego development through object relations to outline a process of development from "the infant's subjective oneness with his nonhuman environment" to a more mature sense of a relationship with the nonhuman realm. Searles proposes that for the young child, the "crucial phase of differentiation involves the infant's becoming aware of himself as differentiated not only from his human environment *but also from his nonhuman environment*" (1960, pp. 29–30; emphasis in original). In contrast to the Romantic perspective, for Searles the initial experience of infantile oneness is marked by the deep anxiety of association with what is at some times a "chaotically uncontrollable nonhuman environment." At other times during infancy, however, the world is experienced more positively—as "a harmonious extension of our world-embracing self"—and so the subsequent process of differentiation carries its own anxieties as well (1960, p. 39). Later, especially during adolescence, the natural world in particular provokes in the individual a "sense of inner *conflict* concerning his awareness that he is part of Nature and yet apart from all the rest of nonhuman Nature; and the two great ingredients of this inner conflict—man's *yearning to* become wholly at one with his nonhuman environment, and his contrasting *anxiety lest* he become so and thus lose his own unique humanness" (1960, p. 114; emphasis in

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original). Thus, negotiating this conflict, rather than either total rejection of nature or Romantic identification with it, opens the adult to a more mature and healthy adult selfhood and relationship to the world:

> It is my conviction . . . that the more directly we can relate ourselves to the nonhuman environment as it exists—the more our relatedness to it is freed from perceptual distortions in the form of projection, transference, and so on—the more truly meaningful, the more solidly emotionally satisfying, is our experience with this environment. Far from our finding it to be a state of negativity and deadness, we find in ourselves a sense of kinship toward it which is as alive as it is real. (Searles, 1960, p. 115)

Whatever one thinks of his specific convictions or conclusions, Searles establishes an important framework for discussing the affective, symbolic, and interpersonal dynamics of an individual relationship with nature. A number of more recent theorists have also developed the object relations approach in exploring the psychodynamics of environmental experiences from childhood onward, both with respect to place in general (Hart, 1979) and with special attention to the natural world (Holmes, 1999; Kidner, 2001).

Revisiting these themes with the help of theorists from Wordsworth through Jean Gebser, environmental psychologist Louise Chawla (1994) explores the persistence and use of childhood memories of nature in the adult consciousnesses of five contemporary American poets. In Chawla's analysis, these poets actively use and rework their memories of childhood to forge (or to transform) their adult self-identities and their poetic and personal visions of nature, with widely differing results—from joyous affirmation to defiant resignation. (For related work within more strictly empirical environmental psychology, see, e.g., Sebba, 1991; Daitch, Kweon, Larsen, Tyler, & Vining, 1996.)

Focusing on more specifically environmentalist research subjects and concerns, Chawla (1998, 1999) and others have researched the significant life experiences that contributed to the career paths and commitments of environmental professionals, with implications both for psychological research and for educational practice. Similarly, Thomashow's (1995) notion of "ecological identity" stands as both a focal point around which to discuss previous research and a guiding ideal or life-path clarification tool in environmental education. Indeed, Thomashow's book reminds us that most of the recent work on the devel-

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opmental dimensions of the human relationship with nature has been undertaken in the context of awareness of ecological crisis and commitment to ethical, practical, and political responses. From whatever disciplinary location—even one valuing scientific research and objectivity—such work is always simultaneously an attempted description of individual development and an actual intervention in that development.

Place Theory

For many people, broad terms such as "the nonhuman environment" or "ecological identity" are too general, too abstract to have any meaning in their lives. What really matters to most people is not "the planet" as a whole, but rather specific *places—this* home, *this* soil, *this* town, area, or region. As one example, the lives and identities of the people living in the southern Appalachian area of the United States have historically and culturally been closely entwined with the hills and hollows that surround them. For one mountaineer interviewed in Tennessee in the 1960s, the possibility of having to leave his home place—which was forced upon many by economic circumstances—tore at his sense of self-worth and identity, a dilemma he placed before his son as well:

> We're born to this land here, and it's no good when you leave. . . . But he knows what I'm telling him: for us it's a choice we have, between going away or else staying here and not seeing much money at all, but working on the land, like we know how to do, living here, where you can feel you're you, and no one else, and there isn't the next guy pushing on you and kicking you and calling you every bad name there is. (Coles, 1967, pp. 17–18)

"*Where you can feel you're you, and no one else.*" For this mountaineer, a sense of grounding in place is absolutely essential to his individual identity.

Similarly, African-American feminist bell hooks finds an important element of identity through a historical and communal continuity with place, but with greater options for carrying that identity with her to somewhere new:

> As a child I loved playing in dirt, in that rich Kentucky soil, that was a source of life. Before I understood anything about the pain and exploitation of the southern system of sharecropping, I understood that grown-up black folks loved the land. I could stand with my grandfather Daddy Jerry and look out at fields of

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> growing vegetables, tomatoes, corn, collards, and know that this was his handiwork. I could see the look of pride on his face as I expressed wonder and awe at the magic of growing things. I knew that my grandmother Baba's backyard garden would yield beans, sweet potatoes, cabbages, and yellow squash, that she too would walk with pride among the rows and rows of growing vegetables showing us what the earth will give when tended lovingly. (hooks, 1999, pp. 51–52)

The power of these memories challenges hooks to work to transplant that sense of place from Kentucky to New York City through her adult experiences of urban gardening: "I feel connected to my ancestors when I can put a meal on the table of food I grew" (1999, p. 56).

Our experience is never of "the earth" as an actual whole, but of some particular place on the earth, a place defined both by physical boundaries and by the actions, concepts, meanings, and feelings that we enact within (or with) it—boundaries and behaviors that in turn play a role in defining us. Indeed, it is the specificity of place that allows it to serve as a basis for or reflection of individual identity; or perhaps place and selfhood are mutually codefining. In any case, a focus on place recognizes that some parts of the world are more important to an individual's identity than other parts, or at least contribute to identity in different ways than others do—and sees this not as a limitation but as a source of strength. (For a history of the philosophical concept of place, see Casey, 1997.)

Although most formulations of place theory stress built and even imagined or symbolic dimensions as much or more than natural ones, such analysis is relevant to the importance of the physical environment for identity (both personal and social). In a sense, the entire field of humanistic geography takes this as its central concern: "We humans are geographical beings transforming the earth and making it into a home, and that transformed world affects who we are" (Sack, 1997, p. 1). For many geographical theorists, place plays a central role in this process: "The mix of nature, meaning, and social relations that help constitute us are possible and accessible because of the activities of place and space. . . . The interthreading of place and self can thus oscillate from having places make us more aware of ourselves and our distinctiveness, to making us less aware, to the point where place and self are fused and conflated" (Sack, 1997, pp. 131, 136). Phenomenologically inclined geographers stress the constant creation of place as "world" or "life-world" through

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a bodily based subjectivity of perception, feeling, and action (e.g., Relph, 1976; Seamon, 1979).

Within environmental psychology, the intersection of self and place has been explored in a variety of ways, giving varying degrees of importance to the nonhuman world itself. For some theorists, place is psychologically meaningful primarily as a means of regulating human interactions through privacy, territoriality, and the personalization of space, with important implications for identity (e.g., Altman, 1975). Acknowledging the psychological and symbolic importance of the material world itself leads us closer to the notion of place identity. In one formulation, "place identity is conceived of as a substructure of the person's self-identity that is comprised of cognitions about the physical environment that also serve to define who the person is" (Proshansky & Fabian, 1987, pp. 22).

More recent work has proposed a deeper sense of relationship with the nonhuman world through attachment to place (Altman & Low, 1992). In particular, home—one of the most important places for humans, as for any species—has received special treatment from environmental psychologists (see, e.g., Altman & Werner, 1985) as well as from philosophers (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Bachelard, 1964) and design professionals (Marcus, 1995). Although none of these approaches specifically stresses the importance of the natural world, they all analyze the ways in which identity is shaped through experience of or relationship with particular nonhuman places and beings.

The Links among Identity, Ethics, and Action

For many, a sense of personal relationship to nature or place evokes an ethical commitment to practical action to protect and care for the natural environment—that is, environmental identity can lead directly to an identity as an environmental*ist*. Such identities are writ large in public figures such as John Muir and Rachel Carson. Muir's career as one of the founders of the turn-of-the-century conservation movement is indelibly associated in the public mind both with his beloved California mountains (especially Yosemite Valley) and with the Sierra Club, the environmentalist organization that he founded in 1894 to help protect those mountains. (See Holmes, 1999, for a theoretically informed

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analysis of the genesis of Muir's attachment to Yosemite, and, e.g., Turner, 1985, for the full story of how that attachment constituted the center of his subsequent environmental activism.)

In a similar manner, Carson proceeded from a fascination with and scientific study of the ecology of ocean and shore (which led to her initial literary fame and public recognition) to a broader environmental awareness: "I am not afraid of being thought a sentimentalist when I stand here tonight and tell you that I believe natural beauty has a necessary place in the spiritual development of any individual or any society" (Carson, 1998, p. 160). This sense of an ecologically grounded personal identity would lead her to a more specific public identity as well. Following the 1962 publication of *Silent Spring*, her groundbreaking exposé of the environmental and health dangers of pesticides, Carson became the archetypal modern environmentalist—the knowledgeable citizen whose understanding of the connection between environmental damage and human health leads to forceful action for governmental regulation of industrial pollution and corporate power.

The relationship between environmental identity and ethical action embodied in figures such as Carson and Muir has been analyzed philosophically in a variety of ways. Perhaps the most influential recent discourse relating identity and environmental ethics—in popular culture and environmental activism as well as in scholarly circles—has been that of deep ecology. While the dominant tradition in environmental philosophy is concerned with extending the concepts of rights or value to nonhuman beings (see, e.g., Nash, 1989), deep ecology explicitly calls for the extension of the sense of personal identity to include or encompass nature: "Spiritual growth, or unfolding, begins when we cease to understand or see ourselves as isolated and narrow competing egos and begin to identify with other humans from our family and friends to, eventually, our species. But the deep ecology sense of self requires a further maturity and growth, an identification which goes beyond humanity to include the nonhuman world" (Devall & Sessions, 1985, p. 67). The process of awakening to this ecological self includes both a personal dimension, "a humbling but also gratifying shift to a more expansive, accommodating, and joyous identity," and a more public and active aspect, as a "ground for effective engagement with the forces and pathologies that imperil us" (Macy, 1989, pp. 203, 202). Given its nor-

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mative stance and concern for practical transformation, it is not surprising that deep ecology concerns itself both with issues of personal lifestyle (Devall, 1988) and with community building and ritual (Seed, Macy, Fleming, & Naess, 1988). Fundamentally, deep ecology is not so much a theory as a practice; to echo Marx, the real point is not so much to describe the relationship of self to the natural world, as to change it.

Of course, if understood simplistically, the basic deep ecology assertion of an expansion of selfhood to include nature can be absurd, vacuous, and/or arrogant, and so some deep ecologists have taken pains to develop the approach in more philosophically nuanced ways:

> What identification should not be taken to mean . . . is *identity*—that I literally *am* that tree over there, for example. What is being emphasized is . . . that through the process of identification my *sense* of self (my experiential self) can expand to include the tree even though I and the tree remain physically "separate" (even here, however, the word *separate* must not be taken too literally because ecology tells us that my physical self and the tree are physically *interlinked* in all sorts of ways). (Fox, 1990, pp. 231–232; emphasis in original)

The proposed fusion of person and planet should not be taken to deny the very real differences between the human and the nonhuman, or between various members of the nonhuman realm: according to one sympathetic feminist critic, "What is missing from deep ecology is a developed sense of *difference*. . . . A sense of oneness with the planet and all its life-forms is a necessary first step, but an *informed* sensibility is the prerequisite second step" (McFague, 1993, p. 128; emphasis in original).

In an effort to avoid such difficulties, other environmental philosophers propose a similar expansion of the sense of self, not through sheer "identification," but through a more active and relational approach; our emotions, relationships, actions, and intellect take us outside of ourselves and into contact with the world and it is (in part) through this contact that we come to be and to know who we are. In phenomenological terms, "the individual may profitably be thought of not as a thing but as a field," a range of integrated actions and emotions; in particular, "[i]f we were to regard ourselves as 'fields of care' rather than as discrete objects in a neutral environment, our understanding of our relationship to the world might be fundamentally transformed" (Evernden, 1985, pp. 43, 47; for other uses of phenomenology in environmental ethics, see, e.g., Abram, 1996; Clayton, 1998).

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Moreover, it is within this tradition of philosophical and ethical speculation that I would locate the development in the 1990s of "ecopsychology." Ecopsychology's image of "a psyche the size of the earth" echoes the expansion of self-identification proposed by deep ecology: "Unlike other mainstream schools of psychology that limit themselves to the intrapsychic mechanisms or to a narrow social range that may not look beyond the family, ecopsychology proceeds from the assumption that at its deepest level the psyche remains sympathetically bonded to the Earth that mothered us into existence" (Roszak, Gomes, & Kanner, 1995, pp. xvii, 5). Despite the occasional theoretical insights and individual observations to be found in its writings, ecopsychology is not so much a descriptive or empirical psychology as it is an ethical and practical outlook in response to the present environmental crisis; like deep ecology, ecopsychology constitutes a self-transformative practice, and indeed has been formulated as a therapeutic approach (e.g., Clinebell, 1996). At the same time, these normative philosophical perspectives are by no means irrelevant for more conventional scholarly or scientific approaches, and the packaging of ecopsychology as "psychology" may help it serve as a moral guide or inspiration to the field of environmental psychology proper (Reser, 1995; Bragg, 1996).

Conclusion and Future Directions

This brief consideration of some lives and theories is not intended to be a comprehensive survey of the issues but rather an illustrative and evocative tour through some of the intersections of environment and identity: the primal importance of bodily or kinesthetic self-awareness in conditioning one's sense of identity; a sense of continuity across the life-span, especially the integration of childhood memory in adult self-image; environmental experiences in the growth and maintenance of individuality or uniqueness; self-definition and self-worth through assertion, work, and achievement; the importance for identity of communal or regional identity and of moral and political commitment; and what might be called "ecological identity," or a felt relationship with natural beings, places, and processes on their own terms (including, perhaps, "Nature" or "the Earth" as an imagined or symbolic whole). On the one hand, all

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of these elements are present to some extent in the life and identity of every individual; on the other hand, any one of them may take on a special importance in defining the shape and direction of a particular life.

Some of the important directions and challenges for future research in the field include increasing integration of interpretive approaches; recognizing the importance of culture in shaping environmental experiences; incorporating social and cultural diversity in research and analysis; and exploring a more inclusive range of occupations and activities than the usual focus on specifically environmentalist ones. I again take my cues from the life experiences of particular people in particular places.

Integration of Interpretive Approaches

For David Mas Masumoto, a third-generation Japanese-American peach farmer, personal, familial, and communal identity are all intermingled and rooted in place: "The greatest lesson I glean from my fields is that I cannot farm alone. . . . When I gaze over my farm I imagine Baachan [grandmother] or Dad walking through the fields. They seem content, at home on this land. My Sun Crest peaches are now part of the history of this place I too call home. I understand where I am because I know where I came from. I am homebound, forever linked to a piece of earth and the living creatures that reside here" (Masumoto, 1995, p. 229). Moreover, confronting the environmental and economic pressures of contemporary California agriculture, Masumoto's decision to "farm a new way, working with, and not against, nature" (p. 4) leads to transformations that are deeper than the merely agricultural. Among other things, Masumoto's personal and familial journey leads to a renewed commitment to low-impact, organic farming as a practical ethical expression of his love for the land—for *his* land, for that particular place. Thus, Masumoto's life (and life story) can be best understood through an integrated approach that incorporates all of the dimensions mentioned in the earlier literature review—psychological development, sense of place, and ethical action. Indeed, perhaps the most important lesson afforded by the study of personal life stories is the need to question and to cross disciplinary and intellectual boundaries in pursuit of more integrated, holistic, and encompassing perspectives on the complex reality of human lives and experience.

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The Importance of Culture

As noted earlier, Katy Payne's rural childhood was filled not only with animals and open spaces but also with books and stories, both published and unpublished. In her adult work as a wildlife biologist, her groundbreaking investigations of elephant vocalization and communication were guided at important points not only by scientific research but also by her musical sensitivity and training (such as her childhood memories of feeling rather than hearing the low organ notes in Bach's *Passion According to St. Matthew*). Similarly, Rachel Carson notes the crucial influence of literature in shaping her early interest in the ocean, quoting Emily Dickinson:

I never saw a moor,
I never saw the sea,
Yet know I how the heather looks,
And what a wave must be.

Indeed, Carson "never saw the ocean until I went from college to the marine laboratories at Woods Hole. . . . Yet as a child I was fascinated by the thought of it. I dreamed about it and wondered what it would look like. I loved Swinburne and Masefield and all the other great sea poets" (1998, p. 148).

As these examples make clear, human experiences of nature—even in childhood—are never direct and unmediated; rather, perceptions are formed into experience and identity in part through the power of cultural symbols, ideas, and visions. This power has increased with the advent of mass media and electronic communication; for many young people, nature shows on television and stories of environmental destruction in the media and on the Internet may be as or more important than hands-on outdoor experience in forming an environmental consciousness. Thus, in fully understanding the genesis and shape of environmental attitudes and identity, we must attend to what people are reading, hearing, viewing, and fantasizing in school, at home, and in cultural settings, as well as to what they are doing and observing in the natural and built environments themselves. (For a broader statement on the cultural construction of nature, see Cronon, 1996.)

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Diversity of Subjects

As some of the life stories mentioned here have already suggested, the role of the natural world in each person's life and identity is inextricably bound up with sociocultural factors such as gender, race, class, sexuality, occupation, ethnicity, and nationality—each factor historically contextualized in ways appropriate to the life of the subject in question. For example, in Borneo, the profession of "tree climber" has emerged in response to the needs of Western scientific expeditions for workers to identify and gather specimens from the high canopy of the rain forest (Primack, Goh, & Kalu, 2001). Master tree climbers such as Jugah Tagi and Banyeng Ludong gain both personal pride and public recognition—from scientific as well as local communities—through their skills in climbing high trees with minimal equipment and in identifying plant species at a glance; such work often involves incorporating both Western and indigenous systems of botanical knowledge, illustrating the blending of tradition and modernity in shaping the meanings of nature in individual lives. At the same time, the tree climbers' particular environmental identity also includes an element of resistance to the clash of cultures; their stories of using their superior knowledge and skill to save inexperienced Western scientists from the dangers of the rainforest, though told with characteristic humor, perhaps represent an assertion of self and culture in the face of the changes wrought by the invasion of the outside world.

For reasons of academic methodology and popular mythology, scholarly attention has traditionally been paid primarily to middle- and upper-class white persons (particularly males), ignoring the diversity of experience and perspective to be found in individuals and communities. Moreover, placing issues of gender, race, class, and political and power relationships at the center of our research and interpretation goes beyond the sheer inclusion of previously underrepresented groups (important as that inclusion is) to require a reshaping of the questions and categories of analysis overall. Not only the people of whom we ask the questions, but the questions themselves must take into account social location as both shaping and being shaped by environmental experience and identity. To note just one such axis of analysis, the example of the Borneo tree climbers suggests the ways in which the natural world can provide modes of identity and action from which dislocated or oppressed peoples

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can forge stances of power and resistance (even as the environmental justice movement emphasizes the increased risk of toxicity and environmental degradation borne by such groups). Toward the other end of the power spectrum, we must critically analyze the roles of gender, race, and class status in the lives and identities of the traditional environmental villains and heroes alike, from the Carnegies and Rockefellers to the Muirs and Carsons.

Inclusive Range of Occupations and Activities

Their engagement with nature defines the identities of working people and communities as well as academics and environmentalists (see also, e.g., White, 1996). For example, in the northern woods and mountains of the Adirondack region of New York State, anthropologist Katherine Henshaw Knott (1998) analyzes the "indigenous knowledge" possessed by loggers, guides, trappers, and maple syrup producers, exploring the implications of that knowledge for personal identity and social continuity. For Ross Putnam (one of Knott's interviewees), a lifelong relationship to and knowledge of the woods supports both his personal self-image and his role as father:

> "I always liked the woods, even when we were small," he says. His boys used to go hunting with him all the time; he taught them all he could about survival—the quickest way to build a fire when it's wet, and the different kinds of trees. "Usually anything in the woods I notice, but I don't know a lot of the names. The bark on the yellow birch—you can eat it. It tastes just like wintergreen." (Knott, 1998, p. 145)

For another interviewee, Pierre LeBrun, a logger, the woods have shaped his selfhood in more bodily and sensuous ways: "In the woods is rough, but is good for yourself, for your health, the fresh air . . . I feel good. When you go into the woods, you change, you are not the same. It is so beautiful—the birds, the deer, the porcupine" (Knott, 1998, p. 114).

From a humanistic perspective, studying the environmental experiences and identities of workers and others—even those who participate in the destruction of the natural world—is valuable simply for acknowledging and exploring the widest range of human experience. At the same time, for purely environmentalist ends, it seems as crucial to learn how to stop destructive orientations as to promote conservationist ones; moreover, it may well not be from the political and social activists but

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rather from those quiet, unassuming people living with the land—farmers, workers, housekeepers, and others—that we have most to learn in forging rich and enduring patterns of identity and action within the natural world.

Building upon these and other intellectual and cultural resources, the scholarly approaches represented in this volume are important in formulating more deep, rich, and specific questions and insights about the intersections of identity and the natural world. However, the topic is much too important and elusive to be completely captured within any one body of scholarship, but rather is one of the common provocations, challenges, and joys of human intellectual and cultural life in general. Juxtaposing a variety of life stories, theories, and data, the work in this field possesses more than merely academic interest. It can help us all reach a deeper understanding of the interconnections of selves and the natural world, as a guide and inspiration toward the future health and flourishing of both.

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