

# Wilding as a term: too conditional and vague essay samples

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The Wilding of America by Charles Derber presents the reader with the notion of “ wilding,” but does the average person know what it really means? In order to explain, the author provides information on the term’s origin: a history of wilding even before the term was coined, describing the life of the immoral tribe Ik in Africa and the development of American wilding.

According to Derber, wilding is the result of socially prescribed and promoted striving for enrichment and chasing the American Dream. Since the Reagan presidency, wilding has penetrated into all levels and spheres of American life – from leading politicians to mere clerks, from financial gurus to medical specialists. Besides the definition of wilding and classification of it into levels and forms, Derber tries to provide a psychological background of wilders’ behaviors. He summarizes the theories by Marx and Durkheim about people losing their moral cores and bonds to their communities and adds his own explanation about why some forms of wilding have become normal and socially accepted behavior –because it is modeled by politicians, the rich, the media, and advertising. It is scary to consider the author’s words since we come to the inevitable conclusion that wilding is everywhere and that we face it every day – whether in politicians’ lies, e-mail fraud or even just stolen road signs. Wilding as a behavioral term is too broad because there is no clear distinction of where the line is between wilding and non-wilding, the author’s motivational link is very subjective, and other clear and specific and terms already sufficiently define these types of human actions.

Wilding is a broad and conditioned term, which is why it is so hard to draw the line between what is wilding and what is not. Derber’s statement that a “ wilding society is one where wilding is the way to the top” (1) was very

shocking to me since it made me think how every sphere of our life is contaminated by wilding. It seems like success from an American point-of-view can only be reached via wilding. However, the author himself says that not all career advancement is wilding. So how do we draw the line between when person cheats on exams and gets a job (which is clearly wilding) and a person who exploits their network to get a job (which sounds like an innocent, non-wilding act). However, without this network, somebody else might have gotten that position, maybe even somebody who needs to feed a family with three kids. President George W. Bush lying to bring the United States into war is a clear example of political wilding, but is a politician who gives multiple promises to improve his community, but fails to do so a wilder? The other part of Derber's classification that caused some confusion is the degree of wilding. Ultimate wilding is clearly something as severe as murder, but how do you distinguish the line between full-blown wilding and petty wilding? A medical student cheating on one of the hundred tests in his/her studies is minor, but later it could cost somebody their life. Measuring wilding behavior is hard for two reasons: it involves a "human factor" on the part of the doer, -and on the part of the person who is evaluating the behavior since they are influenced by his/her own level of objectivity and social experience.

Derber claims that motivation and post-act remorse could be deciding factors to determine wilding from non-wilding, however I think that these are very limited and biased factors for making judgments on wilding. I totally agree that motivation matters since momentary despair can lead a completely moral person to commit a criminal act. But why does the author

not also include the severity of consequences of the action as another defining factor? For example: a person gets downsized from their job, but he has a big family to feed so he goes and robs a 7/11 and steals money and food; on the way home, he sees his boss's car and smashes it with a baseball bat, since he thinks that the boss unfairly fired him. The next day, at the police department, he totally regrets everything, since it was a moment of despair. Nobody got hurt; there was just personal and business property damage, which the man later would have to pay off. So is it a whole set of wilding acts – instrumental and expressive, economic and social combined or were his actions justified since his motivation was only to get food for his kids? There is another factor: if a real wilder is smart, then he can use motivation as a 'softening factor' to justify criminal actions. A young guy could commit vandal for moral satisfaction, which should be considered expressive wilding, but claim that he did it out of despair since his girlfriend left him. Thus, Derber's use of motivation as one of the deciding factors to determine wilding calls presents a lot of questions since motivation is not easy to measure or figure out. Maybe it would be more salient to consider other factors as well such as the consequences of the action, whether somebody got hurt by the offender, either directly or indirectly, if the offender was a first-timer or regularly committed wilding, but had strong moral motivation and remorse each time (FindLaw).

Derber's outline of wilding is ultimately very broad and conditional, and it is not clear whether this street-originated term needs to be brought into sophisticated scholarly vocabulary at all. There are plenty of terms and definitions already in the official lexicons of various spheres - criminal and

administrative law, finance, psychology, and linguistics that cover the exact same set of actions. Derber puts conditions on wilding acts such as motivation and the degree of severity, which arguably makes the term vague and imprecise, whereas such acts have already been well described and defined by past precedent, legislation, etc. For example: the term economic wilding is hardly sufficient when we are referring to cases of mortgage fraud, burglary, theft, tax evasion, corruption, etc. The degree of wilding can also be described adequately by other existing terms: instead of saying ultimate wilding, we can name concrete acts – murder, rape, etc.; and for full-blown wilding – child harassment and money laundering, which are much more specific and better understood. Many dictionaries such as Cambridge, Longman and Collins do not even have definitions or entries for “ wilding.” Some of others, like Oxford and Farlex’s online free dictionary refer to this term as slang. The author himself says that the word wilding originated from the streets in the 90s. Therefore, wilding as a term seems wholly unnecessary and more suited as an informal notion for any self-centered acts with certain gain for the individual who commits it.

The word “ wilding” serves the purpose of the textbook Wilding of America- it helps name the threatening social devaluation that penetrates our lives. However, the more Derber tries to define the term wilding, the more conditional and questionable it gets. From his explanations, it is hard to draw a line between what acts can be called wilding and non-wilding. Moreover, while Derber names motivation and remorse as deciding factors for wilding, but neglects factors like the consequences and short/long-term damage, which are no less important. Lastly, there are so many other terms that are

much more specific and familiar to the general population that there is no need to introduce another term like wilding.

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