

The Psychological Effects of Nature on Subjective Well-Being: An Experimental Approach

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Abstract : This paper explores the pivotal role of environmental education, specifically outdoor education, in facilitating a psychological connection to nature among young adults. This research aims to contribute to building an empirical and conceptual basis of ecopsychology by providing a picture of psyche-nature interaction. It presents the results of the four-day connection-to-nature workshop. It intends to find out the effects of the awareness of nature on subjective well-being and perception of the meaning of life. This led to finding a battery-recharging effect of nature and the influence of nature at four levels of awareness: external physical perception, internal (bodily) sensation, emotions, and existential meaning. The research on the psychological bond of humans with the natural environment, the subject of ecopsychology, is still in its infancy. However, despite several courageous and fruitful attempts, there are still no direct answers to the fundamental questions about the way in which the natural environment influences humans and the specific role of nature in the human psyche. The urge to address this question was the primary reason for the current experiment. The methodology of this study was taken from the study of Patterson, and from White and Hendee. The methodology included a series of assignments on the perception of nature (the exercises are described in the attachment). Experiences were noted in a personal diary, which we used later for analysis. There are many trustworthy claims that contact with nature has positive effects on human subjective well-being and that it is of essential psychological and spiritual value. But, there is a need for more support and theoretical explanation for this phenomenon. As a contribution to filling these gaps, this qualitative study was conducted. The aim of this study is to explore the psychological effects of short-term awareness of wilderness on one's subjective well-being and on one's sense of the meaning of life. This specific study is based on the more general hypothesis that there are positive relationships between the experience of wilderness and the development of the self, feelings of community, and spiritual development. It restricted the study of the psychological effects of short term stay in nature to two variables (subjective well-being and the sense of meaning of life). The study aimed at (i) testing the hypothesis that there are positive effects of the awareness of wilderness on the subjective sense of well-being and meaning in life, (ii) understanding the nature of the psychological need for wilderness. Although there is a substantial amount of data on the psychological benefits of nature, we still lack a theory that explains the findings. The present research aims to contribute to such a theory. This is an experiment aimed specifically at the effects of nature on the sense of well-being and meaning in life.

Keywords : environmental education, psychological connection to nature, subjective well-being, symbolic meaning of nature, emotional reaction to nature, meaning of life

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