

The Separation From Nature: Implications on Human Well-being and the Future of Our Planet

by

Sarah Carr Barnes

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Approved by:

Jacqueline Ignatova, Ph.D., Thesis Director

Reader

Amy T. Galloway, Ph.D., Second

College

Jefford Vahlbusch, Ph.D., Dean, The Honors

Abstract

Research suggests that the amount of time people spend outside is the lowest it has been in human history (Larson and Verma, 1999; Louv, 2008; Pergams and Zaradic, 2006). Spending time outside is valuable and plays a great importance in childhood development. However, the decline in time people spend in time is adversely affecting childhood development, human health, and well-being (Barker et al., 2014; Moffitt et al., 2010). The rising decrease in time spent outdoors is not only a threat to human health and well-being, but it is a threat to future environmentalism and the health of our planet. Children who do spend time experiencing nature are less likely to exhibit environmental behaviors later in life (Collado, Corraliza, Staats & Ruiz, 2015). It is our responsibility to be stewards of the planet and to teach younger generations to be environmentally responsible. I argue that the decline in time spent in nature is a result of three main factors resulting from the neoliberal economy we currently live in. Urban development is the first factor I will discuss. The development of urban areas is directly correlated with the amount of natural environments that are accessible for human use. Secondly, mass consumption has changed our priorities, our desires, and the way we treat the environment. Finally, I will discuss how our current day economy has led to a huge shift in the way individuals spend their time. Three questions focus my research. Why is spending time outside is crucial for human well-being and the well-being of our planet? What factors are driving the decline in human time spent in nature? What can we do to mend the gap between humans and nature? Through this study, I aim to bring attention to the wealth that nature brings to our lives and why we must fight to mend the gap between humans and nature.

Introduction

The way people experience nature has changed radically. We are no longer rooted in nature like our ancestors before us and many people are unaware of the great importance nature plays in our lives. In a single generation, the amount of time children spend in nature has declined by 50 percent (Moss, 2012). Over 2,000 parents in the United States reported that their children spend an average of only 4 hours a week outside. These parents astonishingly reported that when they were children, the average time they spent outside was 8.2 hours a week (Moss, 2012).

Although this distancing between humans and nature has a longer history, I will primarily be analyzing the 1980s until the present day. This time period is important to consider due to the neoliberal economic shift that was occurring, which resulted in the intensification of the disconnect between humans and nature. Since this time period, there have been extensive increases in the use of technology and mass consumerism, and a rise in the amount of time people are spending at work and in school.

Television is often cited for causing an increased amount of time spent indoors (Louv, 2008; Putnam, 2000). In 1965, Americans spent less than 15 percent of their free time watching television. In 1995, the amount of free time spent watching TV dramatically increased to 40 percent (Putnam, 2000, p. 222). One statistic shows that the amount of American sixth-graders with a TV in their room increased from 6 percent in 1970 to 77 percent in 1999 (Putnam, 2000, p.223). Americans at the end of the twentieth century were watching more TV than ever which lead to a decline in time spent in nature, in the community, or engaging in social activities.

Professor Robert Putnam directly correlates the rising popularity of the TV with a national decline in social connectedness during this time period. Around the same time period, the use of computers was also experiencing a boom in popularity among Americans. The modern internet we are familiar with today was invented in 1983, followed that year by the invention of the laptop (Zimmermann, 2017). The amount of computers in the American household skyrocketed from 8.2 percent in 1984 to 89.3 percent in 2016 (Ryan, 2018). The rise of media and technologies like the TV and computer have changed the way Americans spend their time, causing a decline in the amount of free time people spend outdoors. This time period is also important to examine due to changing work norms that were occurring, resulting in an increased detachment from nature. In 1981, 42 percent of married woman with young with children were employed. This proportion of employed married mothers dramatically increased to 64 percent in 1998 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1999). Along with increased technology and shifting work norms, many neoliberal policies were pushed through during the 1980s. Policies such as the rollback of business, trade, and environmental regulations took place in order to favor free-market capitalism that emphasized high levels of competition and economic productivity (Thompson, 1985; Harvey, 2007; McCarthy and Prudham, 2004).

Whereas I will primarily be focusing on the United States for my research, similar patterns of detachment from nature seem to be occurring globally within countries with mass consumer economies (Harvey, 2007; Daly, 2004; Leonard, 2011). Advanced industrialized countries that are technology-focused, hyper-productive, and have mass consumer economies are experiencing the greatest decline in human time spent in nature (Larson and Verma, 1999).

A mass consumer society is defined as a society where a majority of people consume large amounts of goods that capitalistic economic relations generate. In mass consumer societies, people use an increased proportion of their income on consumer products and entertainment rather than on necessities such as food and clothing. International economist, Torsten Slok, performed a study to understand the proportion of income American families were spending on necessities and luxuries. Slok defines luxuries as “goods or services consumed in greater proportions as a person’s income increases and necessities as those goods or services that make up a smaller proportion of spending as a person’s income increases (Slok et al., 2018, p. 30).” This would include dining out, spending money on entertainment, or increased consumption of goods such as technology or apparel. In 2014, high income families were spending 65 percent of their income on luxury goods and services, and 35 percent of their income on necessities such as food and shelter. Middle income families were spending 50 percent of their income on luxuries and 50 percent on necessities, and low income families spent 40 percent of their income on luxuries and 60 percent on necessities (Slok et al., 2018). These statistics bring attention to the rising mass consumer economy that we are experiencing today. This pattern of consumption has led to a separation from nature and a decline in time spent outside. Consuming items such as technology or choosing to spend time at malls or movie theaters further exacerbates our separation with nature.

Instead of being a part of nature, work norms, consumption patterns, and chaotic lifestyles have driven us further away from it. We are made to believe that the economic system we live in is separate from nature instead of recognizing the wealth that nature provides. The many resources that nature provides drive all economic development and the world depend on it.

We rely on natural resources for the energy we use to heat our home and drive our cars, and the food and water that sustain us. Nature is both the resources that drive economic development and human livelihood as well as the waste sink capacity to absorb human waste. However, the rate in which we are consuming is hindering earth's capability to absorb waste and regenerate the resources we depend on.

Nature drives our entire economy and sustains all human life. The separation from nature has the potential to have detrimental implications for our environment and human well-being. Nature allows us not only to live, but to live well. It is crucial for all stages of human life, starting with childhood development. Spending regular time outdoors is pivotal in developing a child's mental, social, and physical health as well as their ability to be confident, adaptable, and social human beings (Kellert, 2005; Berman et al., 2014) These are lessons that will mold children into the person they will be for the rest of their lives. In adulthood years, nature is crucial for developing a sense of self, place, and social relationships. It boosts overall happiness and provides a safe way to cope with stress and mental illnesses. Being in nature not only enhances happiness and wellbeing, but it fosters an appreciation for the natural world. When humans fail to develop an understanding and respect for the natural world, it greatly impacts how they will treat the earth and its resources in the future (Louv, 2008, p.150; Collado, Corraliza, Staats & Ruiz, 2015).

Through my research, I aim to bring attention to the separation from nature that is occurring, and explain the detrimental implications that could arise from this. I will then explain the factors behind this recent societal dilemma, and lastly, explain why we as humans need nature so much and what we can do to mend the gap between human life and nature. The

purpose of this study is to show that if we can learn to mend the gap between humans and nature, then we can boost the the well-being of ourselves, our communities, and our earth.

The Decline in Outdoor Time

A sobering statistic found that children in the United States spend less time outside each day than inmates at maximum security prisons do. In the United States, prisoners are allowed two hours of time outside each day, whereas half of U.S. children are outside for less than an hour a day (*Dirt is Good*, 2019). Furthermore, the Seattle Children's Research Institute found that the average American child spends as little as 13 minutes per day engaged in outdoor activity compared to the 10 hours they spend relatively motionless (*Seattle Children's*, 2018). Research suggests that the time children spend outside is the lowest it has been in human history (Larson and Verma, 1999; Louv, 2008; Pergams and Zaradic, 2006). While this fact is alarming, the rate at which this decline is occurring proves to be even more unsettling. A study performed by Sandra Hofferth from the University of Michigan found that there was a 50 percent drop from the year 1997 to 2003 in the amount of time children ages 9-12 spent engaging in outdoor activities such as walking, hiking, fishing, gardening or running around. She also found that out of the 800 mothers surveyed, 71 percent of them said they remembered playing outside every day as a child, yet only 26 percent said that their children play outside daily (Hofferth and Sandberg, 2001). This trend is not exclusive to childhood. People of all age groups have been experiencing a decline in time spent with nature. The drop in the amount of time that humans are spending in nature can be proven by examining large natural landscapes and the visitors that frequent these areas. A conservation biologist that sought to understand the shift of time being spent in nature looked into the attendance rates of the U.S. national park system. He found that

overall visits to the U.S. national parks declined 25 percent from 1987 to 2003. In 2005, Yosemite park had 3.4 million visitors which was 20 percent lower than its attendance 10 years before, despite the fact that California grew by 7 million people in this period (Pergams and Zaradic, 2006).

Human Implications for Decline in Time Spent in Nature

While this separation with nature is happening across generations, childhood is especially important to examine. Exposure to nature first begins in the early childhood years, and is needed in order to flourish as healthy individuals. Children are not born knowing about the world that surrounds them- they have to experience it. Nature offers unique complexity that stimulates children's brain through hear, smell, and touch. Nature is arguably one of the most diverse experiences that children will have (Kellert, 2005, pg. 64; Louv, 2008, pg. 87). 90 percent of brain development occurs before the age of 10, which is why experiences in nature are especially crucial for young children (Anderson-McNamee and Bailey, 2010). UNICEF states,

“The complexity of the brain lies not only in the genes, but also in the interaction with the outside world, which shapes the brain accordingly. Aside from genetic predispositions, a child's brain grows based on the experiences and opportunities that the brain is afforded to shape itself as the child grows (Britto, 2014).”

In Richard Louv's book he similarly discusses the importance that nature has on child development. He states, “As the young spend less and less of their lives in natural surroundings, their senses narrow, and this reduces the richness of human experience (Louv, 2008, p. 19).”

Despite the important role that nature plays on childhood development, children are spending a staggering amount of time either indoors or involved in other activities. Children are busier than ever, which leaves them little time to play outdoors. Dr. Stephen Kellert, a former social ecology professor from Yale University, blames this mostly on the rise of “structured

activities.” Structured activities are generally described as highly organized and supervised activities such as sports teams, music lessons or church groups. Unstructured activities would refer to the time children have to run around, goof off, climb trees, jump rope, or search for insects. Although structured activity can be beneficial for children and allow them to develop skills, it is crucial they have enough time for unstructured outdoor playtime or developmental implications could arise. Structured activities often require children to wait until they are directed before they begin an activity. While the child may learn cooperation, they are being told exactly what to do, how to do it, and when to do it. Unstructured activity offers a different but vastly important component to a child’s development. An outdoor unstructured environment allows children to be creative and explore complex realms of nature. This time allows children to develop problem solving skills that can boost of self esteem and confidence (Kellert, 2005, p. 3).

Professors from the Department of Psychology and Neuroscience at the University of Colorado Boulder, performed a study to better understand the developmental importance of unstructured outdoor play. In order to do this, they tested the executive functions of children who spend a majority of time participating in structured activities, and compared them with children who spend most of their free time engaging in unstructured play. The authors define executive functioning as “The cognitive control processes that regulate thought and action in support of goal-directed behavior,” and argue that “executive functions (EFs) in childhood predict important life outcomes (Barker et al., 2014, p. 4).” During this study, children were asked to describe their schedule and how they spend their free time. The children and parents were also asked to provide information about how much unsupervised time the children have (the study calls this the “helicopter parent test”). The children then had a series of tests to complete

including verbal fluency tests, vocabulary tests, and problem-solving tests. The results of this study found that children who spent more time in unstructured or less-structured activities had better self-directed control and executive functions than children who were more involved in supervised highly structured activities. This study was conducted on more than 100 children from across the country with varying socioeconomic backgrounds. While the findings suggest that increased time spent in unstructured activities led to children doing better on cognitive tests, the conclusions are limited due to the varying vocabulary skills children possessed prior to testing (Barker et al., 2014). A similar study conducted tests that started in early childhood and continued throughout the participants adult life until they reached the age 35. Unlike the Barker et al. study, this study controlled for differences in general intelligence to get a more accurate understanding of executive functioning. This study concluded that children with worse executive functioning “go on to have poorer health, wealth, and social outcomes in adulthood than children with better executive functioning (Moffitt et al., 2010, p. 2696).”

While the rise in structured activities greatly contributes to the decline in childhood time spent outside, this can also be attributed to the increased use of technology. When children are bored, they often turn to technology for entertainment instead of choosing to find it in nature. One study found that parents of children ages 8-12 years old reported that their children spent three times as many hours using computers, game consoles, and television each week than they did playing outside (Hofferth and Sandberg, 200, p. 39). Richard Louv states that children between the ages of 8 and 18 spend an average of 6.5 hours a day plugged in electronically (Louv, 2008, p. 48). Children are exposed to media and technology in mass amounts from an extremely young age. By the time the average American child goes to kindergarten, they will

have spent nearly 5,000 hours in front of a television- which is disturbingly enough time to earn a college degree (National Wilderness Federation, 2010).

The shift away from spending time outdoors not only poses a threat to healthy childhood mental development, but also to physical health. There is a great amount of research and evidence that explains the link between children's health and nature (Maller and Townsend, 2006; Charles, Louv, Bodner & Guns, 2008, p.15; Kahn and Kellert, 2002). As the amount of time children spend in nature diminishes, the increase in prevalence of health and behavioral issues seems to rise. In an article published by the National Environmental Education Foundation, it states that obesity for preschoolers and adolescents has doubled over the past 30 years as a result of sedentary lifestyles (McCurdy, 2010, p.104). Children are spending more time watching television and playing on the computer rather than playing outside, which not only is physically unhealthy, but also promotes unhealthy habits for children. Habits that are adopted at a young age are likely to stick with children for the rest of their lives which is why it is important for children to be taught how to live healthy lifestyles. The American Academy of Pediatrics notes the importance of children spending time outside by saying, "Sixty minutes of daily unstructured free play is essential to children's physical and mental health" (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2008, p. 17).

Children are meant to run around and spend time outside. However, due to their lack of free time to play outside, children are experiencing greater levels of stress and lower attention spans (McCurdy, 2010, p.104). Teachers and parents get alarmed when a child cannot sit still in class, which leads to a growing amount of misdiagnosis for mental disorders such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). While attention disorders do exist, they have

heightened over the recent decades due in part to the lack of time children have to freely play outdoors and be imaginative and creative. The Center for Disease Control estimates that there are currently 4.5 million children ages 5-17 that have been diagnosed with ADHD, and that the U.S. has become the world's largest consumer of ADHD medications (McCurdy, 2010). Stimulants such as these increased an astonishing 600 percent from 1990 to 1995, and continues to rise. From 2000 to 2003, U.S. spending on ADHD medications for preschoolers alone increased 369 percent (Louv, 2008, p.101). In Marilyn Wedges book, *A Disease Called Childhood*, she states,

“By nature, young children have a lot of energy. They are impulsive, physically active, have trouble sitting still, and don't pay attention for very long. Their natural curiosity leads them to blurt out questions, oblivious in their excitement to interrupting others. Yet we expect five- and six-year-old children to sit still and pay attention in classrooms and contain their curiosity. If they don't, we are quick to diagnose them with ADHD (Wedge, 2015, p.15).”

This statement suggests that we may be too quick to diagnose and medicate children for ADHD when perhaps it is a matter of spending too much time stagnant.

Terry Hartig, a Swedish Professor of Psychology performed several studies to show the connection between high cognitive functioning and exposure to nature. His study demonstrated that children who went on a camping trip had higher scores on a test composed of math, reading, writing, and social studies than the children who went on an urban vacation or took no vacation at all. He also showed that students who spent forty minutes walking outside while listening to music or reading could focus much more on a series of 40 minute tasks than the students who did not go outside prior to the tasks (Hartig, 2014, p.214). In *The Last Child in The Woods*, Richard Louv says, “Compared to the aftereffects of play in paved outdoor or indoor areas, activities in natural, green settings were far more likely to leave ADD children better able to focus and concentrate. Activities that left ADD children in worse shape were far more likely to occur

indoors or outdoor spaces devoid of greenery (Louv, 2008, p.106).” It is difficult to determine whether or not improved cognition is directly correlated with time spent in nature rather than being a result of a break from technology and confined spaces. However, many scholars seem to suggest that regardless the reason, being in nature has had positive effects on cognition (Hartig, 2014; McCurdy 2010; Katcher and Beck, 2015).

Spending less time in nature not only has implications for children, but for all age groups. The demands of life (work, childcare, class work, making money) cause chronic stress for many adolescents and adults. Depression, anxiety, and stress have continuously risen over the years as a result of humans trying to adjust to the competitive and crowded societies we live in. College students in the 2010s were 50 percent more likely to say that they felt overwhelmed and had restless sleep than college students in the 1980s (Twenge, 2014). Although there are several reasons behind this (that I will analyze shortly), spending more time indoors is a large factor. Humans have spent 99.9 percent of their evolutionary history in nature (Miyazaki, 2011, p.39). It is no wonder that being in indoor confined spaces has serious implications on human health. One study shows that too much “artificial stimulation” and time spent in human built environments can cause exhaustion, depression, and loss of health and vitality (Katcher and Beck, 2015). Many studies argue that nature may be the best way to ensure human well-being (Twenge, 2014; Howell, Dopko, Passmore, Buro, 2011; Wilson, 1984; Buss, 2000, p. 22; Joye, 2007). One author suggests, “People with access to nearby natural settings have been found to be healthier overall than other individuals. The longer-term, indirect impacts of nearby nature also include increased levels of satisfaction with one's home, one's job and with life in general (Kaplan, 1989, p.173).” One study additionally found that people who spend time in nature have much lower

cortisol levels than those who do not. Lower cortisol levels result in better moods, increased focus, and overall happiness, however, this study was inconclusive to how long these lower cortisol levels lasted.

Environmental Implications for Decline in Time Spent in Nature

The rising decrease in time spent outdoors is not only a threat to human health and well-being, but it is a threat to future environmentalism and the health of our planet. It is our responsibility to be stewards of the planet and to teach younger generations to be environmentally responsible. Climate change, sustainability, and human impact are increasingly being taught in school curriculums. However, despite this increasing environmental awareness, people are more out of tune with nature than ever before. Children are the future of our planet and if we ever want to raise children to become stewards of our earth, we must first enable them to form an understanding and connection to nature. In 1978 a study was conducted to understand the connection between major environmentalists and what influenced their passion for environmental activism. Several members of environmental organizations were surveyed and they all reported that their largest influence was their childhood experience with nature (Louv, 2008, p.150).

Collado similarly argues that the more time a child spends in nature, the more likely the child will be an environmentalist later in life. He discusses “environmental behavior” (EB) and how this directly correlates to the amount of time one has spent in nature. EB could include household activities such as recycling, composting, and choosing more environmental friendly products, or the involvement in extracurricular activities like volunteering for an ecological organization. He also discusses the concept of “eco-awareness” and how people who have spent

more time in nature have a better understanding of what effect human actions have on nature.

After five days of children attending an environmental education program, children's ecological beliefs improved. These beliefs included things such as "plants and animals are extremely important for human life," or "it is critical we learn how to better respect and conserve our natural resources" (Collado, Corraliza, Staats & Ruiz, 2015, p. 66).

The influential author and ecologist Aldo Leopold argued that a connection to nature is a key component of fostering future ecological behavior. He wrote, "We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect (Leopold, 1949 p. 202)." Leopold debunks the false notion that the land is an object we own. We do not own the land, we are simply a part of the land despite the fact that we exploit it for economic gain.

Arguably, the root of the climate crisis itself can be found in this fundamental disconnect with nature. In Thomas Princen's *Treading Softly*, he states, "If there were a single philosophical position in environmental thought, adhered to by all who are concerned about environmental destruction, it is that at the root of that destruction is human's separation with nature. This distancing is what drives overharvesting, over consuming, overpumping, overdumping, and all of the other excesses of modern industrial life" (Princen, 2010, p. 82). Princen points to the fact that when we are disconnected with the land, we are blind to the damage being done. He uses the example of milk to further his point. When we need products such as milk, we simply go to the grocery store to buy the milk. However, we are naive in thinking about the processes behind this. We do not see the production of the milk, and we have no idea where the carton goes when we are finished. The same goes for single-use plastics. 78 million tons of plastic packaging are

produced annually and 32 percent of this plastic is left to flow into our oceans. This would be the equivalent of one garbage truck dumping plastic into the ocean every minute (Plastic Oceans International). Not only is this kind of consumption disruptive due to the waste it leaves behind, but because of the vast amount of resources needed to make these products. The process of producing even one plastic water bottle requires six times as much water than there is in the container (Earth Day Network).

We continue to consume at these absurd levels because we are so disconnected from the land. We do not depend on the land and water systems like we once did, so we are unaware of what happens after our products are thrown away and the rate at which we are using resources. Joshua Reno, a Professor of Anthropology at Binghamton University blames this on the efficient waste disposal systems. In most American cities and towns, there is either a flat fee for garbage service or it is included in a property tax. The waste is immediately taken from the individuals, so they are often unaware of how much waste they are producing or where it goes once it leaves their garbage can (Hopper, 2016).

We are under the impression that consumption can continue on like this because we view our economic system as an entirely separate entity from the environment and do not recognize that there are limits to growth. We are under the assumption that we can infinitely grow despite the fact that the world is very finite. The earth has waste absorbing capacities and the ability to replenish many natural resources, however, it cannot perform these services when the rate of consumption is faster than the earth's ability to reproduce these same resources. In the past decade, $\frac{1}{3}$ of the planet's natural resources have been consumed. 80 percent of the world's forests, and 30 percent of the world's natural resources are gone (Leonard, 2011, p.13). Our

demand for goods and services exceeds what our land and seas can provide (Global Footprint Network).

The disconnect between humans and our land and natural resources comes with detrimental environmental implications. If we continue to blindly consume without recognizing limits to growth, our food systems, natural areas, and health will be jeopardized. There is a great amount of research that suggests if our consumption patterns continue at the current rate, there will be more plastic than fish in the world's oceans by 2050 (Kaplan, 2016; Szal, 2016). The negative implications that would arise from this are vast. The ocean produces more than half of the planet's oxygen and stores a majority of our carbon dioxide (National Ocean Service). The ocean provides humans with food to eat, and is necessary for all forms of life. Waste not only pollutes our oceans, but contaminates our streams, rivers, groundwater systems and soil (Kaplan, 2016).

While there are countless negative effects that come from the way we are currently treating our planet, I would argue that we cannot combat these issues without first realizing them. Without establishing a relationship with the land, we may never be able to understand our limits to growth. Reconnecting with the land allows individuals to understand ecosystem services such as waste absorption, lessons such as where are food comes from, and a better understanding of our dependence on the earth's resources.

Contributing Factors for the Decline of Time Spent in Nature

The decline in human time spent in nature can greatly be attributed to our current day neoliberal society. I argue that this steep decline is a result of three main factors resulting from the economy we currently live in. Urban development is the first factor I will discuss. The

development of urban areas is directly correlated with the amount of natural environments that are accessible for human use. Secondly, mass consumption has changed our priorities, our desires, and the way we treat the environment. We consume as if the earth has infinite resources to support us and to absorb our wastes, without recognizing our ecological limits to growth. With our current rate of consumption, we are not living within the earth's capacity to provide fertile soils, clean air, clean water and productive oceans. Finally, I will discuss how our current day economy has led to a huge shift in the way individuals spend their time. Human priorities have shifted and being successful is a goal we all strive for. We compete for the best schools, jobs, cars, houses, etc. This has led to an increase in time spent working, shopping, and staying busy. The shift in the way people spend their time diminishes the amount of time they have to enjoy their community and the simplicity that nature has to offer.

Due to rapidly expanding industries and economic growth, vast urbanization is occurring. The United Nations reported that 55 percent of the world's population currently lives in urban settings. They project that this percent is expected to increase to 68 percent by the year 2050 (United Nations, 2018). In the United States alone, more than 75 percent of the country's population lives in urban areas (US Census Bureau, 2015). In the year 1900, 40 percent of U.S. households lived on farm lands. 90 years later this percentage dwindled to a mere 1.9 percent (Louv, 2018, p.18). Urbanization has led to a decline in natural areas and community parks. Instead of planning urban areas around natural systems and wildlife, many cities are not concerned with these spaces at all, leaving few natural areas for people to enjoy. As a result of the influx of people moving to cities, urban areas are becoming more chaotic and crowded. Busier roads and communities offer less space for people to spend time outside. The U.S.

Department of Transportation reported that in 1969, 89 percent of children grades K-8 who lived within one mile of their school walked or cycled to school. In 2009, only 35 percent of children grades K-8 who lived within a mile of their school walked or bicycled (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2006). Urbanization and development leads to overcrowded urban areas and promotes mass consumption. An American architect professor states that many malls are being developed with entertainment like live music and food in order to become what he calls “lifestyle centers” (Matcher, 2017). The intention of creating centers such as this is to encourage people to spend money and purchase goods. Instead of urban areas relying on natural landscapes such as public parks to promote community, malls and retail areas are developed to promote private sector interest that will result in great profit.

Our economy affects the built environment we live in and encourages mass consumption and accumulation through advertising. Starting from a young age, we are taught to associate material accumulation with success. The media makes us believe we have to have the newest and nicest technology, cars, houses, and clothes. Instead of being encouraged to spend time outside and among our community, companies want their consumers watching ads on television, shopping in malls, and spending money. Due to media and ads, we are constantly aware of new products we think we need. One shocking study found that children can recognize on average 1,000 different corporate logos but only a few plants and animals native to the area they live (Kahn and Kellert, 2002, p. 5). Many industries encourage fast consumption by using planned obsolescence. This means many products are designed purposely to have a short lifespan or to become quickly obsolete, so that the consumer will be forced to purchase the newest product (Satyro, Sacomano, Contador, Telles, 2018). The lightbulb is a prime example of manufactured

obsolescence. Many early light bulbs lasted upwards of 2,000 hours. However, manufacturers wanted to standardize light bulbs and make them disposable household objects. Lightbulbs that burnt out more frequently may be more profitable for companies, but they result in more waste. The current standard lightbulb many people use today only burns around 750 to 1,000 hours (Chung, 2014). When light bulbs are thrown away, they pose threats to the soil and air due to the harmful chemicals they contain. Despite the fact that there are more energy efficient alternatives such as the LED light bulb (which lasts more than 5,000 hours), companies continue to develop products that do not last in order to make the greatest profit (Chung, 2014). Along with planned obsolescence, many companies also use perceived obsolescence as a tool to boost sales. This is when a consumer is made to believe that they need a new product, when their existing product is working just fine. Companies use advertising in order to make consumers desire the latest products. Advertising may make a new product appear to be more trendy or attractive in order to convince consumers that if they want to be cool and up-to-date, they too must buy a new product. Product obsolescence leads to a declining resource availability as well as a decreased capacity for the earth to absorb its waste.

Media and advertising portrays the false notion that human value is dependent upon the amount of money one has, or the amount of products they consume. The alarming rate of consumption is illustrated in the book *The Story of Stuff*. Humans are currently consuming more than twice the amount of stuff as they were consuming 50 years ago and a huge proportion of the goods we purchase are not adding any value to human existence as reflected in the high rate of disposal of these products. Americans spend on average \$1.2 trillion dollars on goods and services they do not need. These products include items such as new technology (when existing

technology still works) and trendy clothing items (Whitehouse, 2011). It is clear how meaningless the items we consume are when you look at the fact that 99 percent of the stuff Americans consume is trashed within 6 months (Leonard, 2011, p. 4). As Naomi Klein states, “There is a connection between the way we trash our stuff and the way we are trashing the planet, which is the ultimate source of all that stuff (Chouinard, 2016 p. 1).” We fail to recognize that there are limits to growth and continue to strive to accumulate more and more. Rather than seeking the wealth that nature provides in our lives, we are caught in an infinite cycle of accumulation in hopes that new products will leave us feeling happier. New York philosopher William Barret states, “Modern civilization has raised the material level of millions of people beyond the expectations of the past, has it succeeded in making people happier? To judge the bulk of modern literature, we would have to answer No; and in some respects we might even have to say it has accomplished the reverse (Barrett, 1979 p. 108).” American economist, Herman Daly, similarly discusses the false notion that material accumulation can be used to achieve happiness. In exploring the relationship between human well-being and money he found that “reported levels of happiness within a country did not increase even with dramatic increases in national income over time” (Daly and Farley, 2004, p.236). And that “comparing yourself to others and yearning for money and possessions appear to not only reduce vitality and increase depression but also to increase physical symptoms such as aches and pains” (Daly 2014, p. 240).

The need for material accumulation and success causes a shift in the way humans spend their time. People are busier than ever and seem to be filling their lives with more and more activities to stay productive and busy. In Herman Daly’s critique of our present day economy, he argues that our current social goal is economic growth (Daly, 2014). From a young age, children

are expected to stay busy, go to school, and fill their lives with resume building activities in order to get a job, make money, and accumulate products. Parents often think they are doing their children a favor by signing them up for as several activities so that a child can become “well rounded,” as well as to make children more competitive for success later in life. As mentioned earlier, the rise of structured activities has led to a demise in the amount of time children have to spend outside. Children have lost nearly 12 hours of free time a week since the 1970s. Over this span of time, there has been a 25 percent decrease in play and a 50 percent decrease in unstructured activity (Kellert, 2017, p. 28). A similar study from the University of Michigan examined the change in how children spend their time from the year 1981 to 1997. This study found that children ages 6-8 experienced an 18 percent increase in the amount of time spent in school, a 145 percent increase in the amount of time spent doing homework, and a 168 percent increase in the amount of time children spend shopping with their parents (Gray, 2011, p. 445). While technology such as computers and television have resulted in less outdoor play, this is also due to a shift in priorities and competitiveness and pressure to be successful. The lengths of school days and school years have increased, and more children are enrolled in academically oriented preschools and kindergartens than in the past (Gray, 2011, p. 447). This is also due to the demise in free time that adults have to take their children outside to play. In the year 1973, the average amount of leisure time adults had a week was 26 hours. In 2008, this number dropped to 16 hours a week (Harris Poll, 2008).

Individuals overall seem to be placing a larger value on their time. Instead of spending highly cherished time relaxing or enjoying nature, Americans seem to be using this time to climb a never-ending ladder towards economic growth. Whillans and Dunn explore the relationship

between productivity, the way people spend their time, and environmentalism. The author's main argument is that putting an economic value on time undermines environmental behavior. The idea of "time is money," is a concept that many adults feel is prevalent in today's society.

However, when people believe this concept, they are more likely to focus on their own needs and goals as opposed to the needs and goals of others, their community, and the environment.

Whillans and Dunn believe that when people perceive their time as highly valuable, they become irrationally protective of this time. Due to the pressure humans have to make more money and accumulate more material goods, people no longer have time for a slow-paced life. This leads to adults spending less time with their children, children having less time to play outside, and society valuing material items instead of experiences. As Eugene Peterson says, "We add dollars to our income, rooms to our houses, activities to our schedules, appointments to our calendars, and the quality of life diminishes with each addition... the crowd turns us into spectators and consumers. Our lives have become flabby and indulgent" (Peterson, 2009, p. 2000). Peterson points out the need humans have to accumulate more and more. Instead of being intentional about the time we spend and the stuff we consume, we continue to meaninglessly add more to our lives in order to keep up with the people around us.

Benefits of Nature

Nature provides countless aesthetic, economic, ecological, and human benefits. As I mentioned earlier, the economy relies on nature to function. Contrary to popular belief, the economy can benefit off of nature without having to exploit it. There seems to be a misconception that economic development and protecting nature cannot coexist. However, in order to sustain the economy for future generations, nature must be protected. Nature provides

crucial services that human life and the economy depend on. Wetlands, for example, are acclaimed for removing toxic substances and excess nutrients from the water that help to improve overall water quality (EPA, 2016). Due to the natural filtration that wetlands provide, the cost of drinking water treatment greatly decreases. It is estimated that the Congaree Bottomland Hardwood Swamp in South Carolina would require a 5 million dollar treatment plant in order to filter the same amount of pollutants that this wetland already naturally does (EPA, 2016). Wetlands also greatly reduce the amount of flooding that occurs in areas because they hold excess water that would otherwise cause significant damage (Pennsylvania Land Trust Association). The economy also greatly benefits off of the tourism that wildlife areas attract. In 2015, the national parks generated 32 billion dollars for the national economy and supported 300,000 jobs (National Parks Conservation Agency, 2016). Scientists from the World Wildlife Fund estimate that benefits from nature such as forestry, farming, and tourism generate around 125 trillion dollars a year (WWF, 2016).

Aside from economic benefits, nature is beneficial to human well-being. Simply being in nature not only has proven physical, mental, and spiritual benefits, but it allows us to flourish. While it is necessary to understand the implications in children's health, growth, and development that arise from the lack of time spent in nature, it is equally as important to understand the life-enhancing benefits nature provides. To fully reap the benefits that nature offers, time in nature must be frequent, and meaningful. Kellert explains that there are two different ways to spend time in nature. The first is to spend time experiencing what he calls "wild nature." This could be an array of activities such as hiking or camping. It refers to time spent exploring with no real agenda or structure. This offers people the chance to fully engage with the

natural habitat that surrounds him. The second type of nature time is “domesticated” nature. Domesticated nature time can include more structured nature activities like planting seeds, harvesting vegetables, or caring for plants (Kellert, 2002). Keller argues that both types of nature time are equally important. The first, “wild nature,” gives people a sense of wonder, allows them to restore their mindset, and gives them the opportunity to form a deep connection with nature. “Domesticated” nature is also important because it allows us to engage with natural resources and learn how to respect and take care of our planet. Although there are many different outdoor activities, research suggests that by simply just being outside and enjoying nature can provide benefits for your energy, physical, mental and spiritual well-being (Kellert, 2002; Louv, 2008; Britto, 2014; Barker et al., 2014).

Exposure to nature is crucial during the formative childhood years. Kellert states, “Play in nature, particularly during the critical period of middle childhood, appears to be an especially important time for developing the capacities for creativity, problem-solving, and emotional and intellectual development (Kellert, 2005, p.9).” Qualities that are taught in nature are characteristics that will mold children into the person they will be and will benefit them for their entire life. When children spend time in nature, they are put in situations where they have to learn problem-solving skills. According to a March, 2010 survey by the National Wildlife Foundation of nearly 2,000 educators, 75 percent of students who spend regular time outdoors are more creative and better problem-solvers (National Wildlife Foundation, 2010, p.3). These skills make children feel independent which boosts their self confidence. When a child is subject to too much supervision or planned and organized activities, they do not have the opportunity to try things on their own and make their own decisions. Nature offers an area for children to

explore and realize their abilities. Nature stimulates children and encourages them to ask questions about the world around them. Rachel Carson believed that it was more important for a child to experience the natural world and develop their own curiosities rather than being told what to learn. She says,

“If a child is to keep alive his inborn sense of wonder without any such gift from the fairies, he needs the companionship of at least one adult who can share it, rediscovering with him the joy, excitement and mystery of the world we live in. It is more important to pave the way for the child to want to know than to put him on a diet of facts he is not ready to assimilate (Carson, 1956, p.25).”

Carson highlights the importance of allowing children to experience nature and develop curiosities on their own instead of teaching them how to think. She believes that if children are able to develop an excitement and mystery for nature, they will never want to stop exploring the world that surrounds us.

Due to the complexity that nature provides, children are challenged to cope with adversity, take risks, and confront the unknown and achieve a sense of independence and self-confidence. When children see themselves as part of the earth (instead of dominating it), they are more likely to view others this way. If we are just part of the natural environment, how can anyone be better than anyone else? Many scholars would argue that nature makes humans strong, capable, kind, and happy (Kellert, 2005; Katcher and Beck, 2015; McCurdy, 2010).

Nature is also beneficial to human mental health because it provides a way to safely cope with stress. Spending regular time in nature is shown to reduce anger, stress, and anxious feelings (Mayer, Frantz, Bruehlman-Senecal, Dolliver, 2008). One study found that participants who walked in a forest had lower levels of the stress hormone, cortisol, and lower blood pressure levels than those who did not go outside at all (Park, 2010). Berman et al. puts forth a fascinating

yet somewhat controversial argument: spending time in nature has similar if not the same results as many anxiety and depression medications. They performed a study where 20 adults with major depressive disorder were assessed for their short-term memory and current moods. These individuals then took 50 minute walks in the woods and were reassessed for their mood and short-term memory. The following week they did the same procedure, except this time they were asked to walk in an urban setting. The short-term memory and mood of the participants after walking in the woods was significantly higher than the memory and mood of the individuals after walking in an urban setting (Berman et al., 2014). The notion that nature has restorative and healing powers is widespread. Research indicates that even briefly being in nature can drastically reduce the sense of fatigue (Miyazaki, 2016).

Cortisol is the human body's main stress hormone. High levels of cortisol can have many negative impacts such as headaches, anxiety and depression, weight gain, trouble sleeping, and memory and concentration issues (Mayer, Frantz, Bruehlman-Senecal, Dolliver, 2008). Many scientists have performed studies using functional magnetic resonance imagery (fMRI) in order to map the brain and understand what outside forces influence the brain's level of cortisol. Japanese professor and researcher, Yoshifumi Miyazaki, studied nature's effect on 280 people. He found that being in natural surroundings, or even looking at natural settings allows people's minds to relax. The subjects who were shown images of city scenes had a lot of brain activity and blood flow to amygdala, which is a part of the brain that processes fear and anxiety. The subjects that were shown images of natural landscapes, on the other hand, had a lit up anterior cingulate cortex, which is an area of the brain associated with altruism and empathy (Miyazaki, 2016). Miyazaki studied many different brains and found the lowest cortisol levels in the people

that had actually spent time in nature. However, people that had merely looked at nature scenes seemed to also have much lower cortisol levels than those who were not exposed to any kind of nature. Even when people do not have the opportunity to spend time outdoors, they can reap many of the benefits that nature offers. There is a large amount of research that suggests that hospital patients have shorter recovery time when they have a window with a view of a natural area instead of an urban scene or a brick wall (Barton and Pretty, 2010). One study, from the University of Queensland, noted that offices with plant life had a 15 percent higher productivity rate than offices lacking greenery (Johansson, 2018). While looking at natural scenes or being surrounded by greenery may have some of the same (but less dramatic) benefits that nature has such as decreased stress levels and increased cognitive functioning and focus, the benefits of nature cannot fully be reaped without direct outdoor exposure. Exposure to nature does many things for us such as boosting the immune system. When we breathe in fresh air, we are breathing in a chemical that plants give off called phytoncides. When we breathe in phytoncides, our body produces a larger amount white natural killer blood cells. Natural killer cells are known to fight off many types of diseases (Johansson, 2018). One study found that increased natural killer cell activity from a 2 day trip spent in the woods lasted for more than 30 days on its participants (Miyazaki, 2016).

Meaningful time in nature is not only physically restorative, but also spiritually restorative. Spending more time in nature could arguably be a positive solution for shifting away from mass consumption. One study was conducted where a group of adults were enrolled in a week-long wilderness program. The participants reported that this time in nature was not only restorative and restful, but that it allowed them to reflect on their lives, and reconsider their

priorities (Kaplan, 1992). Nature allows us to realize that we can flourish without all of the material goods that clutter our lives. Stepping away from the chaos of life can make people reassess what is truly important.

Social health is also extremely important for human well-being. Kahn and Kellert argue that one of the most important things in adolescent years is developing a sense of place and a sense of meaning. In adolescent years, the quest for meaning is most related to establishing roots that come from our surrounding environments (Kahn and Kellert, 2002). Hiking and running trails, local parks and gardens, and community centers are areas where people can develop their “sense of place.” People’s most meaningful and memorable moments in nature typically occur in the company of friends and family (Kellert, 2017, p. 35). A study conducted in Chicago found that poorer neighborhoods who had more green spaces such as parks and trees consisted of people that claimed they were overall calmer. The residents who lived in greener areas also reported having a stronger sense of community than residents of neighborhoods lacking green spaces (Kuo and Sullivan, 2001). A more recent study found that urban areas with greater amounts of public outdoor areas had more “social cohesion” than areas with less green areas. These areas such as parks, forests, and lakes facilitated community communities. This same study explained that when people have closer ties to their community and surrounding environments, crime and violence decreases (Bogar and Beyer, 2016). People who spend too much time inside without outdoor exposure may be more likely to feel socially isolated. When people get outside they are exposed to neighbors, community members, dog walkers, runners, ect. Feeling more socially connected can reduce anxiety, depression and self confidence issues (Kellert, 2017).

Feeling connected to the land allows people to feel like they belong. As Leopold wrote, “We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect” (Leopold, 1949 p. viii). This feeling of belonging and connectedness to nature leads to eco-friendly acts. Being in nature allows us to realize that our resources do more than provide us economic goods. Time spent in our natural environment helps us to better see the negative effects of abusing, exploiting, and trashing our natural environment. Our quality of life is not defined by the items we own or the amount of money we have, but the environment that surrounds us, and our place in it.

Solutions for Mending the Disconnect

Human, community, and environmental well-being is all derived from nature. Nature is crucial for our quality of life. In order to ensure the health of our children and the future of our planet, we must mend the gap between humans and nature. In order to mend this gap, we must not only shift the way we spend our time, but also shift priorities. It is necessary that the concept of wealth is redefined to measure attributes such as “physical and mental health, spiritual well-being, healthy relationships, love and respect, the conditions of our physical environment and the well-being of nature” (Anielski, 2007, p. 20).

It is crucial that people recognize our limits to growth in order to start living within our means and deprioritizing consumption and material accumulation. Herman Daly argues that the way our economy currently operates is under the assumptions that we live in an “empty world” when in reality we live in a very “full world” (Daly, 2007, p10.). An “empty world” system means that we assume we can continue to produce and consume at the rates we do. We pretend like we live on a planet with infinite resources and no limits to grow. We currently live in a full

world, which means we have depleted many resources, exploited natural systems and are full of infrastructure like roads and building. However, when we continue to assume we live in an empty world and consume resources and exploit our earth at rates faster than earth's natural capacity to absorb wastes and replenish natural resources, "uneconomic growth" occurs. Daly explains the concept of uneconomic growth as growth beyond our limits, resulting in more costs than benefits. Uneconomic growth is unsustainable and results in the diminished quality of human life in the long run. Unsustainable growth rates do not make the economy better, but result in negative economic effects, making us poorer not richer. Decline in fish populations, loss of agricultural land, contaminated water sources, and loss of resources like wood and fossil fuels are all potential threats that exceeding our limits to growth could have on the economy (Daly, 2007, p. 22). This type of growth not only poses threats to the economy, but can also degrade the human quality of life. When our economy pushes its limits, we are sacrificing things such as the resources needed for survival, recreational outdoor areas that bring us joy, and clean air (Daly, 2007, p23).

In order to develop an ecological economy that does not put society and our future generations in jeopardy, our economic system must change. Ecological economics is a field that aims to prioritize human well-being and the environment. In ecological economics, it is recognized that there are more important things than consumption such as friends and family (social capital), health and education (human capital), and earth's natural resources and services (natural capital) (Gowdy and Erickson, 2005). A system that can fill society's needs and wants without sacrificing the environment and its resources is what we should be fighting for. Herman Daly argues that we should be operating around a "full world" system in which we recognize that

we cannot endlessly grow, and we must establish “when to stop rules” (Daly, 2007, p.24). The current neoliberal economy we operate in exists solely because of the environment, which is why it is so crucial to prioritize protecting our environment.

Many scholars believe that monetizing the economic value of services that ecosystems provide could be a way to bring attention to the human dependencies on nature and place more value on ecological services. Without nature, the economy is nothing. Many believe that placing a price on nature would allow individuals, corporations, and policymakers to fully realize how dependent the economy is on nature. It also has the potential to increase awareness about the economic costs that are occurring due to ignoring environmental limits. However, the economic valuation of nature is not without its controversy. Some scholars argue that it is wrong to “put a price tag on nature” because this has the potential to make it just another commodity that can be priced, bought, and sold. Critics also argue that it would be far too difficult to place an accurate value on the colossal amount of goods and services nature provides (Rae and Munns, 2018).

While this topic may be controversial, many scholars, environmentalists, and economists have performed studies to place prices on nature or ecologic systems in order to bring attention to the costs of not protecting our environment. In 2006, the Environmental Protection Agency performed a benefit-cost analysis to understand what would happen if they made the standard for air quality of soot higher. The recommended air quality threshold for soot was 15 micrograms of soot per cubic meter, and they performed a test to see what the results would be if they decreased this amount only slightly to 14 micrograms of soot per cubic meter. The EPA found that this seemingly trivial reduction would reduce expenses for the regulated industries, resulting in an annual 1.9 billion dollars that would've been spent. Additionally, this higher standard was

estimated to save 24,000 premature deaths (Rosenbaum, 2011). By showing the cost-benefits of environmental regulations, it has the potential to influence policy makers and change the rules of the game.

While this may be a topic up for debate, many environmentalists would agree on the fact that in order to avoid “uneconomic growth,” patterns of consumption cannot stay the same (Rae and Munns, 2018; Gowdy and Erickson, 2005; Chouinard, 2005). Economist and author E.F. Schumacher argues that we currently base our “standard of living” by the amount of consumption that is occurring, assuming that people who consume more are better off (Schumacher, 1973). Schumacher challenges this assumption by contending that consumption should only be a means to well-being. If we were only consuming goods that we needed to sustain us through life, then people who need less for survival- thus consuming less- should actually be the happiest. Schumacher contends that instead of striving for continuous economic growth and accumulation, we need to care about things such as the support of our community, clean air, having access to beautiful places, culture, and education (Schumacher, 1973, p.43).

In *Let My People Go Surfing*, Klein similarly argues that in order to fully flourish, we need to consume less. She urges the audience to end this meaningless cycle of consumption and instead see products as tools to help us live our real lives. If we begin to use products as tools instead of meaningless objects, we will have more time and space for things that really matter. Breaking this cycle of consumption is not only beneficial to our well-being, but crucial for the future of our planet. She states,

“Our economic system and our planetary system are now at war. Or more accurately, our economy is at war with many forms of life on Earth, including human life. What the climate needs to avoid collapse is a contraction in humanity's use of resources; what our economic model demands to avoid collapse is unfettered expansion. Only one of these sets of rules can be changed, and it's not the laws of nature... Do we have a chance in the

face of odds?.. If we do, it will because we found things to do other than shopping- like building social and political movements that change the rules of the game. Like deriving deep pleasure from experiences that are not for sale at any price, whether its time in nature or time with our loved ones (Chouinard, 2005, p. 2).”

Klein argues we must start living within our means before detrimental damage to our planet occurs. She highlights the importance of changing the way we currently consume, and placing a higher value on the truly important things in life such as spending time with our family or in our natural surroundings. Klein highlights the importance of natural, social, and human capital on human and societal well-being. In order to achieve optimal well-being and strive to create more ecological economies, it is important to first form a relationship, connection, and love for nature. This will allow us to realize how our economy is embedded within nature, and how dependent we are on nature for life.

One of the most arguably important solutions for reconnecting people and the environment is to engage our future generations with nature. Research also indicates that children who are exposed to nature at a young age are far more likely to care for their planet in the future (Moss, 2012; Moffitt et al., 2010; Louv, 2008). That is why as it is so important for adults, parents, teachers, leaders and role models to engage children in outdoor activities. One study found that nearly all of the children who were asked who taught them about nature responded with “parent” or “teacher” (Kellert, 2002, p. 82). Scholar Julie Davis similarly points out the importance that nature plays on the development of responsibility and caretaking skills. She says,

“Importantly, as parents, teachers, and teacher educators we need to advocate now for the rights of children to have enriching contact with living things, where a love of nature is fostered and where children can truly learn to become caretakers and nurturers of the earth. We need to reinforce the values of cooperation and shared responsibility and to

encourage children to become social and environmental problem-seekers and solutions-creators” (Davis, 1998, p.2).

Davis strongly advocates for outdoor education and believes it is our responsibility to promote outdoor opportunities for young children in order to promote sustainability. She believes that with the right education and support, children can go onto solving solutions to challenges and shape the world around them.

There are many different ways to get children involved in outdoor activities that promote environmental behaviors. One significant activity shown to boost children’s attitudes toward the environment is gardening. Gardening allows children to be outside, get dirty, and learn at a young age how to care for earth’s resources. Getting children involved in composting allows children to see what kinds of foods can be easily absorbed by the earth, and ways in which we can give back to the soil and earth instead of creating more waste. Camping is another fun activity that has many benefits. Children who camp in the outdoors at least once a year are shown to have improved academic performance, and are overall healthier and happier. One study suggests that 98 percent of parents say that camping makes their kids respect and connect and appreciate nature more and that their kids are happier when they are camping (Louv 2008). Nature walks, bike rides, scavenger hunts, and bug hunting are also activities that children can participate in in order to reap the benefits of nature.

Conclusion

American author and environmental advocate, Edward Abbey said,

“It is not enough to fight for the land; it is even more important to enjoy it. While you can. While it’s still here. So get out there and hunt and fish and mess around with your friends, ramble out yonder and explore the forests, climb the mountains, bag the peaks, run the rivers, breathe deep of that yet sweet and lucid air, sit quietly for a while and contemplate the precious stillness, the lovely, mysterious, and awesome space. Enjoy yourselves, keep your brain in your head and your head firmly attached to the body, the

body active and alive, and I promise you this much; I promise you this one sweet victory over our enemies, over those desk-bound men and women with their hearts in a safe deposit box, and their eyes hypnotized by desk calculators. I promise you this; You will outlive [them].” (Abbey, 1994, p.2).

While the challenges of climate change, mass consumption and environmental degradation may seem daunting, reconnecting with nature can be a solution to overcoming these problems.

Edward Abbey emphasizes the importance of reconnecting with nature not only for the future of our planet, but because of the joy and wealth it can bring to our lives. He believes that while it is important to fight for our land, we should also cherish and enjoy spending time in nature.

Profound growth, confidence, independence, and self-awareness for ourselves and those around us comes from ritually spending time in nature. It can improve all aspects of life from physical health, to increased cognitive function, to overall happiness and mental health. As previously discussed, spending time outside can decrease feelings of depression and anxiety, and have a positive impact on an individual’s environmental behavior. However, today’s prevalence of technology, the pressure to be productive and successful, and the continuous cycle of consumption has led to a dramatic decline in the time people are spending in the outdoors.

Spending time in nature is not only important for human prosperity, it is imperative for the future well-being of our planet. Nature affects the way children see the world around them, which will determine how they will treat the natural world in the future. Children are taught from a young age the importance of sharing, being kind, and loving one another. Learning to foster a respect for nature and a will to protect it are critical lessons that must also be taught if we want to ensure human well-being and a sustainable future for generations to come. As Thomas Berry says, “Teaching children about the natural world should be treated as one of the most important events in their lives” (Berry, 1988 p. 2). Too often do we view nature as a source for exploitation

instead of appreciating it for the wealth it brings to our lives. It is crucial that we as humans start spending more time in nature in order to mend the gap between human life and our natural surroundings, and start caring for the health of our earth and the wealth it brings to our lives.

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