Ecological Reasoning and Nature Connectedness in Urban and Suburban Children

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Abstract

Robust evidence from adults links variability in experiences with nature to differences in how people think, feel, and behave towards the natural world, but less research has examined the developmental origins or mechanisms of these processes in children. In the current study with children ages 3- 12-years of age from urban and suburban communities (N = 500), we used a novel passive data collection method to examine the mechanisms by which variability in experiences relates to children's relationships with nature. Suburban children were more likely than urban children to engage in ecological reasoning, attribute personhood to plants, and support conservationist moral values. However, children in both communities who self-reported more nature experiences also felt more connected to nature. Priming children with a familiar ecological relationship also had downstream impacts on children's ecological reasoning and conservationist values. Thus, community, individual experience, and contextual factors all shaped children's nature reasoning.

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