



Illinois Wesleyan University
Digital Commons @ IWU

John Wesley Powell Student Research
Conference

2016, 27th Annual JWP Conference

Apr 16th, 11:00 AM - 12:00 PM

Emotional and Social Responses to Intact and Degraded Nature: What Does it Mean to Lose the Dark?

Analeigh Dao
Illinois Wesleyan University

Linda Kunce, Faculty Advsior
Illinois Wesleyan University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/jwprc>



Part of the [Education Commons](#), and the [Psychology Commons](#)

Dao, Analeigh and Kunce, Faculty Advsior, Linda, "Emotional and Social Responses to Intact and Degraded Nature: What Does it Mean to Lose the Dark?" (2016). *John Wesley Powell Student Research Conference*. 3.

<https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/jwprc/2016/oralpres4/3>

This Event is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been brought to you by Digital Commons @ IWU with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this material in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/ or on the work itself. This material has been accepted for inclusion by faculty at Illinois Wesleyan University. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@iwu.edu.

©Copyright is owned by the author of this document.

Oral Presentation O4.3

**EMOTIONAL AND SOCIAL RESPONSES TO INTACT AND
DEGRADED NATURE: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO LOSE THE
DARK?**

Analeigh Dao and Linda Kunce*

Psychology Department, Illinois Wesleyan University

Based on research documenting benefits of contact with nature on human well-being, and the harm of exposure to environmental degradation, this study aims to explore the effects of stargazing on human psychological reactions. A laboratory-based experimental study was conducted to assess the emotional and social effects of stargazing on humans and how those effects differ when the view of the night sky is degraded rather than intact. All participants watched two slideshows, one of night sky scenes (to mimic stargazing) and one of geometric figures (a control task). Half of the participants were randomly assigned to watch intact versions of the slideshows (i.e., images of dark sky, colored figures) and half were assigned to watch degraded versions (i.e., light polluted sky, black-and-white figures). After each slideshow, participants completed questionnaires about their general emotions, awe experiences, and pro-social responses. Participants reported significantly less stress, more positive mood, and stronger awe experiences after viewing night sky scenes than after viewing geometric figures. In contrast, results for pro-social responses were more mixed. Contrary to hypotheses, the level of degradation had little effect on participants' responses. Results support previous research by affirming the benefits of contact with nature for psychosocial functioning and do so for a less studied yet potentially important human experience: stargazing.

