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

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Oral Presentation O4.3

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

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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.

