



Volunteering at CEI/ Women's Body Image in Relation to the Environment

Anna Haney

College Park Scholars – Science & Global Change Program

Neuroscience

ahaney1@umd.edu

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Introduction

Humans have a unique connection with nature. Nature affects every part of human life down to food supply and even physical wellbeing. Helping to preserve the beauties that nature has to offer will help to strengthen the human connection to nature. Time spent in nature also influences how one views themselves and their self-worth. Women who spend more time in nature hiking, volunteering, or any outdoor activities often have greater feelings of self worth.

Site Information:

Site: Community Ecology Institute

Address: 8000 Harriet Tubman Ln, Columbia, MD 21044

Site Supervisor: Chiara D'Amore

Mission: The Community Ecology Institute (CEI) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization with a mission to enhance community health and well-being by fostering diverse connections between people and the natural world.

Goals: Start a research project on women's body image and continue to prep the farm for the spring/ summer months

Activities:

During this project, I mostly worked on site at the Community Ecology Institute (CEI) to assist with any projects. This could include helping to revitalize the greenhouse, constructing a fence, or heavy lifting. While also working at the actual site, I was also able to become involved in ongoing research on women's body image in relation to the environment. This research project is still in the beginning stages; however, I have been able to assist with writing a literature review, planning a fitness program individuals can do outside, and attending monthly meetings to discuss progress.

Duration of concurrent overnights outdoors	BCS average	Total estimated number of overnight trips	BCS average	Total estimated number of overnights outdoors	BCS average
none	3.2	0-6	3.4	<25	3.4
1-3 nights	3.4	7-15	3.4	25-74	3.4
4-7 nights	3.5	16-21	3.4	75-99	3.4
1 week +	3.5	22-30	3.5	100-149	3.5
2 weeks +	3.5	31-40	3.5	150 - 285	3.5

Figure 1: This is a table from an anchor article listed below by Chiara D'Amore and Denise Mitten, being used for the current research at CEI. This image shows the average BCS (body cathexis scale, or the degree of satisfaction with one's own body) in relation to the number of nights spent at an outdoor retreat. On average, as the number of nights spent outdoors as the outdoor retreat goes up, so does the BCS average (D'Amore, Mitten 2017).

Issues Confronting Site:

In modern times, there is often a disconnect between people and nature. As people stray farther away from nature, they often take for granted what nature has to offer. If the environment is suffering, then so will our community health and diversity. Women are also experiencing poor body image at an alarming rate.



Figure 2: Farm stand that greets volunteers as they drive in



Picture of a typical volunteer experience on the farm (taken by me)

Impact

Nurturing and caring for the environment is imperative to a sustainable future of happiness and a healthy earth. My practicum project opened my eyes to the importance of giving back to our planet. In short term, I was able to assist with many unfinished projects around the farm, while also growing my love for being outdoors and giving back to my community. Not only will the farm itself benefit, but as the organization continues to grow, it can branch out its programs to help others. Currently, CEI offers several programs such as Climate of Hope (education of climate impacts and renewable energy sources), the Roots and Wings program (outdoor classroom for children), and Columbia Families in Nature (enjoyable activities around the farm for families). CEI continually gives back to its community and is continuing to expand its outreach. As well as providing many programs, CEI is also involved in many research projects with a knowledgeable research panel.

Future Work:

I look forward to continue this research project. I am also looking forward to see what kind of outreach publishing a paper on women's body image can have on the community. Giving women solutions for developing better body image could have extremely positive impacts on these people.

Acknowledgments:

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Bibliography

D'Amore, C., Mitten, D. 2017 " The nature of body image: the relationship between women's body image and physical activity in natural environments: Beyond Dualism in Gender, Body, and Environment". *Research Gate*,. DOI:10.4324/9781315167244-7

For figure 2 Image: Community Ecology Institute, "Farm Stand," <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/482aec1f50694bbeb662f4f5d62d1798>



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