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Nature, Genetics and the Biophilia Connection: Exploring Linkages with Social Work Values and Practice

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Abstract

Social work's notion of environment and its environmental responsibilities has always been narrowly defined. The profession has tended to either neglect natural environmental issues or accept shallow, ecological conceptualizations of nature as something other, quite separate from the human enterprise and/or outside the reach of social work activity. The Biophilia Hypothesis, first articulated by Harvard biologist E.O.Wilson in 1984, offers social work as a fundamentally different view of the person/environment construct and argues for a primary shift in the way the profession views its relationship with the natural world. This article traces the conceptual development of the Biophilic theory and reviews pivotal empirical evidence explicitly arguing for the essential Biophilic premise that humans have acquired, through their long evolutionary history, a strong genetic predisposition for nature and natural settings. It offers key insights and examples for incorporating Biophilia into social work's values and knowledge base and how it may impact the profession's practice strategies and techniques.

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