

Nancy M. Wells

Web Bio

Information

Biography

Biographical Statement

Nancy Wells is an environmental psychologist who studies people's relationship to the built and natural environment through the life course. Her studies have focused on residential environments -- housing and neighborhoods -- and more recently schools. Dr. Wells completed a joint PhD in Psychology and Architecture at the University of Michigan; and then NIMH post-doctoral training at the University of California, Irvine.

Department Website Summary

The Wells research group focuses on the influence of both the built and natural environment on human health and health behaviors. Research includes studies examining the effects of housing quality on mental health; the influence of neighborhood design on physical activity; the effects of access to green, natural areas on cognitive functioning and psychological well-being. A major recent focus is on the influence of school gardens on children's fruit and vegetable consumption, nutritional knowledge, and physical activity.

Teaching

Teaching and Advising Statement

Professor Wells teaches graduate Research Methods and courses focused on the influence of the environment on public health. Her classes include the graduate seminar, *Environments and Health* (DEA 6610), *Healthy Places* (DEA 2700), and graduate research methods (DEA 6560). Dr. Wells strives to identify synergies in teaching, mentoring, research and outreach. These connections are exemplified in the Wells research lab which serves as a teaching and mentorship laboratory aimed at doing research well, and doing good through research. Nancy Wells' courses typically include a community outreach component to emphasize real world challenges and potential solutions.

Professional

Current Professional Activities

Nancy Wells is a member of the Environmental Design Research Association

(EDRA), the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues (SPSSI), the International Association for the Study of People and their Surroundings (IAPS). She is a frequent presenter at national and international conferences related to residential environments and health-related outcomes.

Research

Current Research Activities

For the last several years, a major focus in the Wells lab has been examination of the influence of school gardens on children's ecological literacy, fruit and vegetable consumption, and physical activity. Using a combination of surveys, direct observation, accelerometry, photography, and interviews, the team's efforts are aimed at understanding what makes a difference in children's health. The School Garden Research study involves approximately 2500 children in 48 schools in four states and is funded through the USDA Food and Nutrition Service People's Garden Program, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Active Living Research Program, Federal Formula Funds, the Atkinson Center for a Sustainable Future, the Bronfenbrenner Center for Translational Research, and the College of Human Ecology. The Wells lab is populated by a dedicated, energetic and interdisciplinary group of undergraduate and graduate students.

Extension

Current Extension Activities

Although Dr. Wells does not have an extension appointment, nearly all her projects include an extension and outreach component. Among her recent projects is the study of school gardens in four states in partnership with more than 30 extension educators; and the retirees in service to the environment (RISE) program in which older adults are trained as environmental stewards.

Education

Education

Dr. Wells received a joint PhD in Psychology and Architecture from the University of Michigan and completed a NIMH post-doctoral fellowship in the School of Social Ecology at the University of California, Irvine. Nancy also received a Master's degree in Design and Environmental Analysis from Cornell University and a Bachelor's degree in Psychology from Connecticut College.

Courses

Courses Taught

DEA 2700 Healthy Places

DEA 6560 Research Methods in Social Sciences

Websites

Related Websites

<http://courses.cit.cornell.edu/dea6610/>

<http://wellslab.human.cornell.edu/>

Administration

Publications

Selected Publications

Myers, B.M. & Wells, N.M. (in press). Children's physical activity while gardening: development of a valid and reliable direct observation tool. *Journal of Physical Activity & Health*.

Demment, M.M., Wells, N.M. & Olson, C.M. (2015). Rural middle school nutrition and physical activity environment and change in BMI during adolescence. *Journal of School Health*.

Wells, N.M., Myers, B.M., & Henderson, C.R. (2014). School gardens & physical activity: A randomized controlled trial of low-income elementary schools. *Preventive Medicine*.

Olson, C.M., Baker, I., Demment, M., Graham, M., May, J., Strawderman, M., Wells, N.M. (2014). The healthy start partnership: An approach to obesity prevention in young families. *Family and Community Health*, 37 (1), 74-85.

Wells, N.M. (2013). The role of nature in children's resilience: cognitive and social processes. In: K. Tidball & M. Krasny (Eds.) *Greening in the Red Zone*. Springer.

Wells, N.M. and Lekies, K.S. (2012). Children and nature: following the trail to environmental attitudes and behavior. In: J. Dickinson and R. Bonney (Eds.) *Citizen Science: public collaboration in environmental research*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Wells, N.M. & Rollings, K.A. (2012). The natural environment: Influences on human health and function. In S. Clayton (Ed.) *The handbook on Environmental and Conservation Psychology*. Oxford University Press.

Wells, N.M. & Donofrio, G.A. (2011). Urban planning, the natural environment, and public health. In: J.O. Nriagu (Ed.) *Encyclopedia of Environmental Health*, volume 5, pp.565-575. Burlington: Elsevier

Pillemer, K., Wells, N.M., Wagenet, L., Meador, R.H. and Parise, J.T. (2011). Environmental sustainability in an aging society: A research agenda. *The Journal of Aging and Health*, 23(3), 433-452. doi: 10.1177/0898264310381278

Gantner, L.A., Olson, C.M., Frongillo, E., Wells, N.M. (2011). Prevalence of non-traditional food stores and distance to healthy foods in a rural food environment. *Journal of Hunger and Environmental Nutrition*, 6, 279-293.

Wells, N.M., Evans, G.W., Beavis, A. & Ong, A.D. (2010). Early childhood poverty, cumulative risk exposure, and weight gain trajectories through young adulthood. *American Journal of Public Health*. doi:10.2105/AJPH.2009.184291

Wells, N.M., Evans, G.W. and Yang, Y. (2010). Environment and health: Planning decisions as public health decisions. *Journal of Architectural and Planning Research*, 27 (2), 124-143.

Pillemer, K. A. Fuller-Rowell, T. Reid C. & Wells N.M. (2010). Environmental volunteering and health outcomes over a twenty-year period. *The Gerontologist*, 50(5), 594-602.

Wells, N.M. and Laquatra, J. (2010). Why green housing and green neighborhoods are important to the health and well-being of older adults. *Generations*. 33(4), 50-57.

Wells, N.M. and Yang, Y. (2008). Neighborhood Design & Walking: A quasi-experimental longitudinal study of low-income Southern women moving to neotraditional or suburban neighborhoods. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 34(4), 313-319.

Wells, N.M. and Harris, J.D. (2007). Housing quality, psychological distress, and the mediating role of social withdrawal: A longitudinal study of low-income women. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 27, 69-78.

Brown, B.B. and Wells, N.M. (Eds.) (2007). Environment, physical activity, and diet. Special Issue of *Environment and Behavior*, 39 (1).

Wells, N.M., Ashdown, S.P., Davies, E.H.S., Cowett, F.D. and Yang, Y. (2007). Environment, Design and Obesity: Opportunities for interdisciplinary collaborative research. *Environment and Behavior*, 39 (1), 6 - 33.

Wells, N.M. and Olson, C.M. (2007). The Ecology of Obesity: Perspectives from life course, design and economics. *Journal of Hunger & Environmental Nutrition*, 1 (3), 99-129.

Wells, N.M. and Lekies, K.S. (2006). Nature and the Life Course: Pathways from childhood nature experiences to adult environmentalism. *Children, Youth, and Environment*, 16 (1), 1-24.

Wells, N.M. (2005). Our housing, ourselves: A longitudinal investigation of low-income women's participatory housing experiences. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 25, 189-206

Wells, N.M. & Evans, G.W. (2003) Nearby Nature: A buffer of life stress among rural children. *Environment and Behavior*, 35 (3), 311-330.

Wells, N.M. (2000). At home with nature: effects of "greenness" on children's cognitive functioning. *Environment and Behavior*, 32 (6), 775-795.