

TO: Interested Parties

FROM: David Metz
Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates

Lori Weigel
Public Opinion Strategies

RE: Key Findings from International Survey of Parents on Children and Nature

DATE: March 14, 2014

The research team of Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates (FM3) and Public Opinion Strategies (POS) recently completed surveys of parents in five markets across the globe – Brazil, China, France, Hong Kong, and the United States – to assess their attitudes toward the amount of time their children spend outdoors in nature.¹ With some variations from place to place, the results show a remarkable international consensus among parents – **they want their children to spend more time outside, and see wide-ranging benefits to them doing so.** Majorities of parents in all five markets see children’s lack of time spent outdoors as a problem – and also say it is “very important” for children to learn about nature, and to spend time outdoors. There is a consensus across all five markets that getting fresh air and exercise is the most important benefit of time outdoors; the primary obstacle is homework and other competing activities (except in Brazil, where concern about safety is acute). The bottom line, however, is that most parents in each of the five markets say that they would like their children to spend more time outdoors than they do.

Among the key specific findings of the surveys were the following:

- **Only minorities of parents say that their children are regularly spending time in nature.** **Figure 1** shows the rate at which parents in each market say that their children are spending time on outdoor activities. While majorities of American, Brazilian, and French parents say their children spend time in a backyard-type area on a regular basis, rates of visitation for natural areas are much lower. Fewer than one in four American parents – and one in five parents in other countries – say that their children spend daily time in a park or a natural area outdoors. The primary competing activity is schoolwork – at least four in five parents in each market (perhaps a little wishfully) say that their children are working on homework on a daily basis. Outside of China and Hong Kong, computers are also a notable rival for time outdoors; majorities of American, French, and Brazilian parents say that their children spend

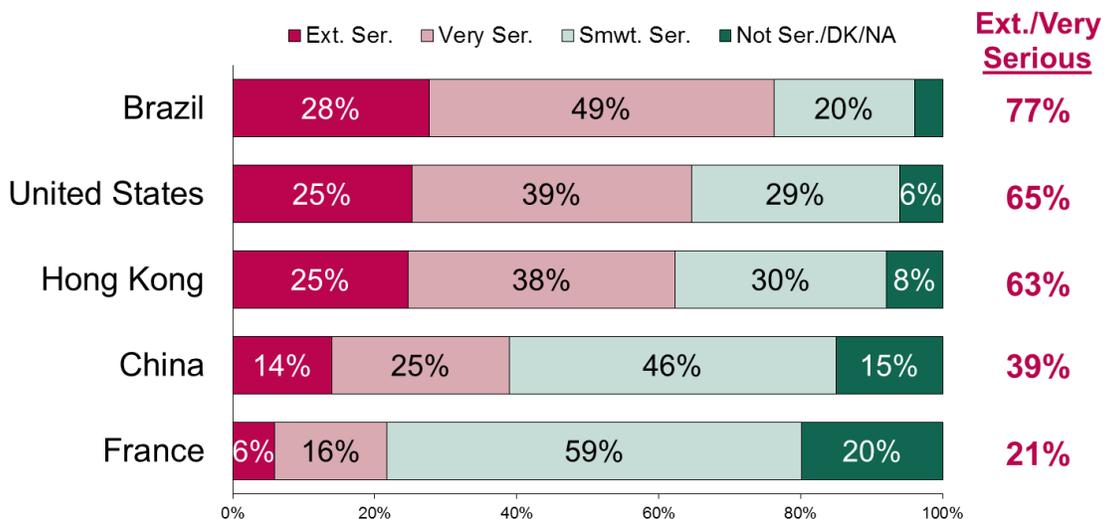
daily time on a computer – more than say the same for most of the outdoor activities listed.

FIGURE 1:
Parents’ Assessment of Their Children’s Participation in Various Activities
(% Saying Their Children Participate “Almost Every Day”)

Activities	United States	Brazil	China	France	Hong Kong
Doing homework or studying for school	81%	84%	88%	88%	89%
Using a computer	73%	71%	35%	56%	47%
Playing or hanging out in a backyard or similar area	66%	60%	43%	73%	9%
Playing an outdoor sport, such as soccer or baseball, or skateboarding, rollerblading, or biking	36%	28%	15%	14%	2%
Visiting a natural area outdoors, with lots of trees, plants, water or wildlife and few or no buildings	22%	13%	4%	16%	1%
Watching nature shows on TV	14%	23%	12%	7%	3%
Visiting a park	9%	5%	5%	4%	8%
Going shopping	5%	5%	4%	1%	2%
Going on an outdoor field trip with their school or youth group, etc.	2%	9%	1%	2%	0%
Going fishing or hunting	2%	0%	1%	0%	0%
Volunteering for a group or at an event related to the environment, like tree-planting or a clean-up day at a park, river, or beach	1%	1%	0%	2%	0%

- **The overwhelming majority of parents in all five markets view children’s lack of time in nature as a problem.** As detailed in **Figure 2**, at least four in five parents in all five markets rate it as at least a “somewhat serious” problem that their children do not spend enough time in nature. Concern is particularly acute in Brazil, Hong Kong, and the United States, where more than three in five parents rate the issue as a “very serious” problem.

FIGURE 2:
Evaluating the Seriousness of “Children Not Spending Enough Time Outdoors and in Nature”



- Parents believe that developing a connection with nature is critical to a child’s development.** Survey respondents were read a list of various things that children might experience or learn (as shown in **Figure 3**), and were asked to rate the relative importance they placed on each one. The experience parents in all five markets rated as most important was “to read more books” – but not far behind that were nature-related experiences “to spend more time outdoors in nature,” and “to learn about nature.” Parents in three of the five markets ranked those as their second and third priorities, and in the other two markets (Brazil and France) the only item to score higher was “to learn how to play a sport” – which itself might entail an outdoor activity. In all markets, playing an instrument or developing artistic abilities were distinctly secondary to developing a better connection to nature.

FIGURE 3:
Priority Parents Assign to Various Things Their Children Might Experience or Learn
(% Rating Each “Extremely” or “Very Important”)

“Now, there are many different life experiences and things to learn for children today. I’d like to ask you to rate a number of these as either being extremely important, very important, somewhat important or not that important to you as something your child should experience or learn.”

Activities	United States	Brazil	China	France	Hong Kong
To read more books	93%	98%	72%	77%	74%
To spend time outdoors in nature	82%	89%	56%	55%	59%
To learn about nature	76%	92%	64%	56%	69%
To develop his or her artistic abilities	66%	70%	40%	38%	46%
To learn how to play a sport	56%	91%	48%	61%	55%
To play a musical instrument	38%	53%	34%	16%	35%

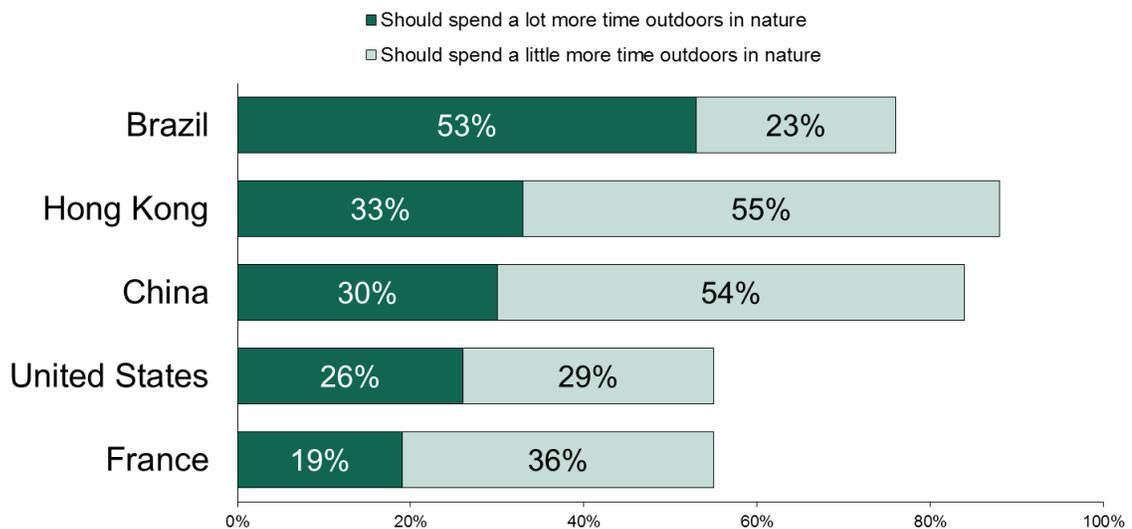
- Parents recognize multiple benefits that children can derive from spending time in nature.** Given a list of potential positive outcomes that might result from children spending more time in nature, parents assigned a high priority to nearly all of them. **Figure 4** on the following page details the proportion of parents who labeled each of these benefits at least “very important” – at least three in five for every single item on the list, across all five markets. In every market but Brazil (where a number of the items polled as equally – and overwhelmingly – important), the top-rated item was “getting fresh air and exercise,” reflecting the very high priority parents assign to the public health benefits that come from time outdoors. Notably, parents also share a strong belief in developing a conservation ethic in their children – with at least three-quarters in each market citing the importance of teaching children to value the conservation of nature.

FIGURE 4:
Rating the Importance of Perceived Benefits of Children Spending Time in Nature
(% Rating Each “Extremely” or “Very Important”)

Benefits	United States	Brazil	China	France	Hong Kong
Getting fresh air and exercise	96%	93%	83%	89%	90%
Having fun	94%	94%	70%	81%	88%
Getting away from TV, video games and computers	89%	75%	62%	52%	82%
Helping them to focus while they are in school	83%	91%	67%	82%	77%
Building a belief in the importance of protecting and conserving nature	81%	96%	75%	81%	86%
*Encouraging them to be more creative, adventurous and discover new things	-	92%	74%	67%	86%
*Gaining an appreciation of healthy food and traditional agriculture	-	92%	65%	77%	75%

- Given all the benefits they see coming from time in nature, parents are eager for their kids to get outside more often.** Majorities of parents in all five markets (as shown in **Figure 5**) want their kids spending more time outdoors. Brazilian parents in particular are practically ushering their children out the front door, with a striking 53-percent majority saying that they want their children to spend *much* more time outdoors.

FIGURE 5:
Parents’ Feelings About Whether Their Children Should Spend More Time Outdoors in Nature



- The obstacles to spending more time outdoors vary significantly by market.** As we have seen, parents believe that spending more time outdoors would benefit their children in many different ways – and are eager for them to spend more time in nature as a result. The logical question, then, is why their kids aren’t already spending a great deal of time outdoors. A survey question asking parents to identify items that pose “major obstacles” to their kids’ spending time outdoors (**Figure 6**) offers some clues. In the US, barriers seem to be relatively low – with no item posing a major obstacle for more than one in five children. In each of the other markets, however, there is a standout issue – whether crime and gangs (Brazil and France); competing priorities like homework (Hong Kong and China); a lack of nearby natural areas (Hong Kong); or schools having cut back on outdoor time (in China – perhaps due to air quality concerns).

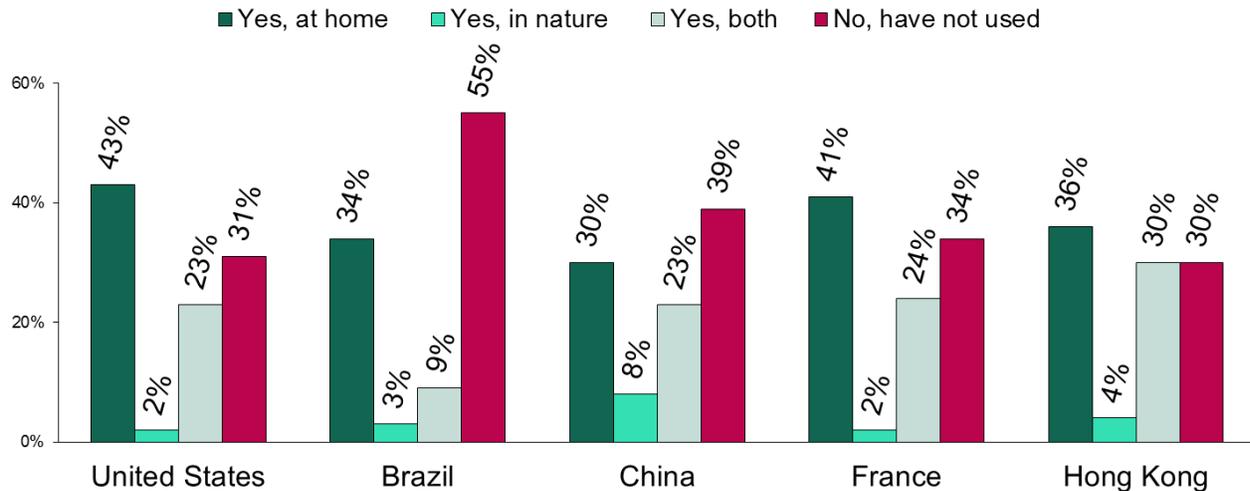
FIGURE 6:
Perceived Barriers to Children Spending More Time Outdoors in Nature
(% Rating Each a “Major Obstacle”)

Reasons	United States	Brazil	China	France	Hong Kong
Your child has too many other things to do – like homework or other activities	19%	21%	43%	25%	52%
Your child’s school has cut back on recess and outdoor time	18%	15%	47%	22%	27%
Crime and gangs make some of these areas unsafe	18%	47%	25%	44%	8%
There are no natural areas anywhere near your home	12%	27%	26%	13%	38%
It’s uncomfortable, because of things like bugs, heat, or rain	10%	10%	12%	10%	11%
Your child is just not interested in spending time in nature	9%	14%	10%	17%	14%
It costs too much to participate in activities out in nature	6%	15%	9%	17%	6%
There’s too much risk of your child getting hurt in a natural area from such things as animals, falls, or getting lost	4%	13%	19%	8%	8%

- Parents indicate varying levels of technology use as a way of finding out more about nature.** As illustrated in **Figure 7** on the following page, majorities of parents in every market but Brazil indicated that they had used an app or some kind of on-line resource to enhance their awareness, understanding, or appreciation of an outdoor area. In every market, parents were much more likely to say they had used such resources from home, rather than while they were outdoors – suggesting an opportunity to promote further engagement with nature by expanding parents’ ability to learn about outdoor opportunities while on the go.

FIGURE 7:
Parents’ Use of Technology to Learn About the Outdoors

Have you personally ever used a web site, app, or some other on-line tool to help you find natural areas or parks; to identify birds, wild flowers, trees; or to learn about the history of an area?



Taken together, the surveys reveal a striking international consensus among parents about many aspects of their children’s outdoor experiences. **As geographically, linguistically, and culturally diverse as these five markets are, all share a strong desire among parents of children in this age range to get their own kids outdoors more.** This desire is driven both by the clear public health benefits that parents perceive from kids spending time outdoors, but also by the central role that parents believe spending time in nature plays in a child’s development. The idea of building a conservation ethic – helping children to understand the importance of conserving nature – is also central to the thinking of parents across these markets.

Note: This survey was commissioned by The Nature Conservancy, with support from Disney.

ⁱ **Methodology:** FM3 and POS completed national surveys of parents of children between the ages of three and 18 in five markets, as described below:

- 800 interviews in the United States from June 7 – 17, 2013
- 400 interviews in China from November 11-25, 2013
- 400 interviews in France from November 11-25, 2013
- 400 interviews in Hong Kong from November 11-25, 2013
- 400 interviews in Brazil from January 15 – February 9, 2014

All interviews were conducted on both landline and wireless phones. The margin of sampling error for the US results is +/- 3.5% at the 95% confidence level; for the other four markets, it is +/- 4.9%. Some percentages do not sum to 100% due to rounding.