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Experiencing Natural Environments, Experiencing Health: A Health Psychology Perspective

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Abstract

This aim of this study was to explore the importance of natural surroundings to human health from a health psychology perspective. The increase in built environments have replaced green spaces in the urban areas and the effects of this has been explored by several disciplines ranging from environmental psychology, leisure studies, urban planning, public health to name a few. Findings from these studies have shown that natural environments do play a significant role in human health. However, it was deemed that exploring the influence of nature on human health from a health psychology viewpoint would provide a different dimension to this established link between nature and humans to press for preserving and providing more green spaces in the cities. Urban green areas offer several benefits such as space for exercise, leisure, psychological space for rejuvenating, healing and social connections that are all crucial for our wellbeing. This study explores the many ways natural settings contribute to health and wellbeing from a health psychology angle. A qualitative design was employed using a phenomenological approach to understand the everyday experience of being in nature/natural environments. Cornwall Park/One Tree Hill in Auckland was chosen as the site for this study. Nine women and men between the ages of 30 and 70 were chosen from this site to take part in the study. Methods of data collection were mainly in-depth interviews and photo-discussion. The data was analysed using a phenomenological approach based on the guidelines developed by Moustakas (1994) and van Manen (1990). The findings revealed that natural surroundings influenced people positively in many ways that contributed to their physical, mental and spiritual well-being. Natural environments satisfied a wide-range of needs, such as providing a place/space to exercise, to be alone and reflect, connect with nature, recreate, heal and socialise to name a few, in green, quiet, pollution-free, aesthetically pleasing settings. The essence of the phenomenon that is estimated to have been captured in the study is, "human experience in nature from the point of view of health psychology, or human experience of wellness, being in nature".

Contents

Title Page	i	
Acknowledgements	ii	
Abstract	iii	
INTROUDCTION		6
METHODOLOGY		8
METHODS		14
FIELD OBSERVATION		14
THE SITE		15
PARTICIPANTS		16
Description of participants.....		16
OPEN-ENDED INTERVIEW		17
PHOTO-PRODUCTION		19
Applied visual method and support for this study.....		19
Merits and demerits of photographs.....		20
ETHICS.....		21
Ethical issues anticipated in this study		21
DATE ANALYSIS		22
Phenomenological context		22
Analytical techniques		22
INTROUDCTION TO ANALYSIS		23
SENSORY EXPERIENCES		26
PHENOMENOLOGICAL BACKGROUND		27

RECALLING THE EXPERIENCE	28
THEORETICAL BACKGROUND	29
NATURISM'S PERSPECTIVE OF SENSE EXPERIENCE AND HEALTH	30
SENSING IN HEALTH PSYCHOLOGY	31
SENSING, AWARENESS AND MINDFULNESS	31
MINDFULNESS AND NATURAL HEALING.....	32
EXPERIENCES OF AN EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHER	33
SPACE AND TIME.....	36
THE MANY FORMS OF SPACE.....	36
INTERACTIONS WITH SPACE	36
SENSE OF SPACE AND SENSE OF TIME.....	37
VISUAL SPACE AND CALMING EXPERIENCES.....	39
PRESSURES OF TIME, SCARCITY OF INDIVIDUAL SPACE AND NEED FOR TRANQUILLITY	40
THERAPEUTIC SPACE.....	42
ENCOUNTERS IN THE ENVIRONMENT: AN ETHICAL ENQUIRY.....	46
THE POSITIVE ENCOUNTERS	47
PHENOMENOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDINGS OF THE EXPERIENCE OF OTHERS.....	49
NEGATIVE ENCOUNTERS IN THE PARK	50
MORAL AND ETHICAL ISSUES.....	51
INTEGRATED UNDERSTANDING	53
CONCLUSION	54
REFERENCES.....	59
APPENDICES	
CONSENT FORM	64
INFORMATION SHEET.....	65
TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION	68

INTROUCTION

Experiencing Nature: A Health Psychology Perspective

The relationship between human beings and nature is historic. The consequences of human civilization on nature are well-known. In the race for urbanisation, growing global trends cities are witnessing a reduction in green spaces largely because political agendas dictate land use for urban development and are parsimonious when it comes to providing green spaces and parks in the cities (Swanwick, Dunnett, & Woolley, 2003) As a result of this, people's contact with nature is diminishing. However, mankind retains an innate connection with nature and people tend to prefer natural surroundings and seek them out for perceived physical and mental health benefits (Herzog, 1992). It is widely recognised that nature and human wellbeing are closely linked and several studies have supported this through their findings. Although several disciplines such as environmental psychology (Moore, 2000), social ecology(Hartig, Mang & Evans, 1991), geography(Eyles & Williams, 2008) public health (Maller, Townsend, Pryor, Brown, & Leger, 2005) landscape architecture and urban planning (Stigsdotter & Grahn, 2002)and leisure studies(Fishwick & Vining, 1992) have substantiated this fact, there are aspects linking the two, (nature and human wellbeing) that nonetheless justify further exploration.

This project aims to delve deeper into those aspects from a health psychology point of view. The objective of this study is to explore the link between natural environments and health, the reasons why people use natural environments, what benefits they seek by using them, what they experience whilst they are amidst nature, their relationship with the natural surroundings and how it influences their health and wellbeing. This study's significance lies in exploring the value of natural environments in the everyday lives of people in urban areas, especially in the present age of environmental degradation (Heyd, 2007). Since health psychology is interested in the psychological basis of the entire sphere of physical health, from the origin of illness to the therapeutic aspects and influencing policy making(Lyons & Chamberlain, 2006, p. 13), the effects of increasing urbanisation and lack of access to green spaces is therefore health psychology's concern. Intensifying the built-environment and the subsequent shortage of natural environments in the city restricts people's exposure to sunlight, fresh-air, recreational space with access to exercise and the several other healthful benefits it provides, is viewed as posing serious implications for health. Peoples' lack of access to these kinds of spaces therefore is a threat to their well-being (Maller et al., 2005).Hence this is significant from a

health psychology point of view, these changes hinder access to healthy living and lifestyles (Lyons & Chamberlain, 2006)

Parks and green-spaces provide space for a range of healthy interactions. Not only that, mankind is innately drawn to nature through historic connections with it and modern urban living is weakening this long-established link (Maller et al., 2005). Urban dwellers' contact with their natural world is progressively decreasing as the natural environment is subjected to degradation and if this trend continues, the human-nature connection will be entirely lost (Maller et al., 2005).

Natural environments provide benefits to humans in all areas of wellbeing (Maller et al., 2005). However, it is not just the direct experience of nature from which individuals derive benefits to their wellbeing but the diverse opportunities it provides (Cattel, Dines, Gesler, & Curtis, 2008) that make it worthy of preservation. The social aspect of being in a shared public space, the sense of community it engenders, the physical activities it provides, the escape from routine, and opportunities to socialise to name a few, are some of the diverse needs of people that parks and urban green spaces fulfil (Cattel et al., 2008). Although environmental degradation is currently the world's most urgent problem, health psychology has a big stake in this matter as it concerns people's behaviour relating not only to their access to the natural environment but also the policy makers' intentions to protect and promulgate parks in the interests of public health.

Cornwall Park/One Tree Hill, a local park in Auckland, was chosen as a site for this study. Several visits to the park over a few months made it possible to observe the extent to which people used the park, the popularity of the place, in what ways they used the park and most importantly, to look for and recruit potential participants for the study. Guided by a qualitative form of inquiry, in-depth interviews were used along with a photo-production component to understand the varied and complex meanings people gave to their experiences.

The reason Cornwall Park and One Tree Hill Domain were chosen as a site for this study is that they are urban green spaces located in the heart of Auckland. They are adjacent to one another and popular because of the diverse features they possess allowing varied activities for every age and ability. Although Cornwall Park and One Tree Hill Domain are run by two different managements, Cornwall Park Trust Board and Auckland City Council respectively, they both serve the same function, and can be treated as a single entity ("Cornwall Park," 2006). The parks' different entrances open out on to some of Auckland's busiest suburbs

making them very accessible to the residents ("Cornwall Park," 2006). There is a variety of activities for people of all ages, ranging from play areas for children, barbecue areas and facilities, walking tracks, to the Stardome, a planetarium ("Cornwall Park," 2006). The hill itself is a volcanic cone offering a steep climb for serious exercisers; there is a working farm and its animals provide great interest for its visitors, and there are restaurants and much more ("Cornwall Park," 2006). From the field observations it was evident that a significantly high number of people use and frequent the park throughout the day. Different people visit it at different times of the day from dog walkers, mothers pushing prams, elderly people, tourists, cyclists, walkers and joggers of all ages , picnickers etc. In that way, this park was an adequate source for sample selection.

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative Inquiry

Exploring the importance of natural environments to human health through individuals' perspectives, the ways in which they validate their beliefs about using nature, their experiences within the places and the meanings natural surroundings have to people in their everyday lives, generates verbal rather than numerical data orienting this study towards qualitative methodology (Schwandt, 2007). As Willig (2008), points out, qualitative research is driven by meaning; the way people construe their worlds and experience events. Furthermore, she adds, it is the quality and texture of experience that matters more to qualitative research rather than the connection between cause and effect. (Flick, Kardoff, & Steinke, 2004) suggest that qualitative research approaches engage in depicting the life-worlds of people through their own perspective which enhances our understanding of how people construct their world.

Reflexivity in research

"Social constructionist ideas" stress that it is more fitting to regard the world or "reality" as "constructed in interaction between researcher and researched" (Murray & Chamberlain, 1999, p. 7). This implies that the "researcher is not and cannot be value free" making "facts and theory, value-laden" and the participants themselves are similarly "involved in the construction through their interaction of their expectations and activities with those of the researcher" (Murray & Chamberlain, 1999, p. 7). Therefore the researcher can neither assume a value-free neutral perspective nor is it possible to separate the "phenomenon under investigation from the context in which it is investigated" (Murray & Chamberlain, 1999, p. 7). Similarly, Finlay (2006), states that the meanings we give to our experiences are influenced by our "situatedness" as researchers and it is the "identity and viewpoint" which we hold that influences the "research process and the findings of the research" (p.19). The author adds that , being "part of the world" that we are discovering, any knowledge from this study "informs us simultaneously about the object of our study and about our own pre-occupations expectations and cultural traditions Besides that, the knowledge gained from the study are "provisional, partial and entirely dependent on the context" (Finlay, 2006, p. 19). As van Manen (1990), also points out , in trying to "make sense of lived experiences with theories and hypothesizing frameworks" we somehow overlook the fact that it is we "human beings who bring schemata" and structure "into being and not" the other way around (p.45).

Therefore what influences this study is the disquiet that stems from intense urbanisation and the loss of green spaces in cities and the myriad ways in which that impacts on human health.

This concern arises out of the belief that nature, with its rejuvenating and healing qualities involuntarily draws humans to it and the extent to which green spaces are lost to concrete structures not only puts the human race in jeopardy but also the entire planet. While the prime focus in this study, is human health, the significant ideological contributions of environmental philosophy (Foltz & Frodeman, 2004), eco-phenomenology (Brown & Toadvine, 2003), eco-psychology (Fisher, 2002) and environmental psychology (Stefanovic, 2004) merit mentioning here. The philosophies underpinning these disciplines have a lot to offer this study, in the way they advocate change in humankind's consciousness, thinking, and actions towards our environment for preservation and protection. These principles run parallel to health psychology's interests, that of finding awareness, changing our thinking and behaviour to reach better health. Therefore, whichever way one may look at things, the larger issues of ecology and environment disconcerting us today ultimately puts our very survival as humans on this planet, at stake.

A reconnaissance trip to the park revealed that there were different kinds of park users. The different ways people used the park was due to their varied intentions and perspectives which in turn created a diverse range of experiences of the park. Further, these experiences shaped the meanings people gave to the events signalling this study towards a relativist ontological stance (Willig, 2008) However, it is participants' being in the park, how they experience it and what health outcomes it has for them that is relevant to the study. The same park is used differently by different people because it is perceived to provide opportunities for them to suit or fulfil their particular needs; runners, joggers, walkers and cyclists go there purely for fitness, groups of mothers pushing babies in prams derive the physical, social and psychological advantages of being outdoors with similar people in a relatively quiet, traffic-free and spacious setting. The multiple meanings and interpretations given by the different park users would therefore orient this study towards a relativist stance and also interpretive epistemology which phenomenological research usually adopts (Finlay, 2006). The meanings and interpretations of the world that are of interest here are those that participants experience in a "pre-reflective state" which falls under the domain of phenomenological inquiry (Finlay, 2006, p. 187).

Phenomenology has a long history. Although phenomenology came into being with the work of its founder Edmund Husserl (1859- 1938) it was in existence for many centuries without the name, with Hindu and later Buddhist philosophers practising it as consciousness which they realized through meditation (Smith, 2009) Similarly phenomenology was practised by various philosophers but it was not labelled as such. It was only through Husserl that phenomenology came into existence (Smith, 2009). As a philosophy of consciousness, phenomenology

developed out of approaches to human experience and consciousness, wherein consciousness is the relationship between the subject and his/her world (Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, 1997, p. 5). Existential phenomenon came first but it is only with the advent of phenomenology did it get a method that suited its interests (Pollio et al., 1997) Though existentialism started with Kierkegaard in the mid 19th century and phenomenology with Husserl at the end of the same century, it was Heidegger who brought the two philosophies together- “that of describing everyday human existence in uniquely human ways” (Pollio et al., 1997, p. 5). The phenomenological movement gathered momentum in the 20th century and up to seven diverse types of phenomenology emerged (Smith, 2009). Phenomenology’s contribution to psychology came from Merleau Ponty as Heidegger was too deeply philosophical to contribute to psychology and it was Merleau Ponty who imparted “psychological insight and empirical research into this philosophical system” that enabled human existence to be studied from a psychological perspective (Pollio et al., 1997).

Place person relationship

The focus of this study being natural surroundings and their role in influencing human health via people’s experiences, grounds it ontologically in place. Exploring place-based research it is interesting to see the way phenomenology ranks highly with these studies focusing on people-place relationships. This is because phenomenology’s philosophical underpinnings have much to offer place-based research (Manzo, 2003). As Manzo (2003), explains, phenomenology explores the “meaning and experiences of places through a descriptive, qualitative in-depth extrication of things in their own terms” and mines through the “ontological nature of humanity, where being in the world is a fundamental irreducible essence and place is an inseparable part of existence” (p. 48). In his essay on the emotional experience of environments, Seamon (1984), states that nearly all philosophical and psychological research neglects the existence of the association between emotional experiences and the world in which we live. However, he adds, phenomenology with its focus on the way we are “inescapably immersed in the world, recognises that emotional ties with the world may be related to the kind of understanding the person gains from the world or with the person’s mode of encountering that world” (Seamon, 1984, p. 757). Hence, the park or natural environments as a place, justifies the use of phenomenology.

Fishwick & Vining (1992), state that to understand the meanings of landscapes for people necessitates accentuating the “subjective meanings and intuitive descriptions of

environmental experiences” (p. 58), which phenomenological analyses can achieve. In their study on decisions influencing use of outdoor recreation areas they used phenomenology to find the person-place relationship (Fishwick & Vining, 1992) They felt that phenomenology aided in harnessing people’s taken-for-granted intentions to reflect and describe their intentions to visit outdoor recreation areas and the content analysis used unravelled some of the participants’ life worlds (Fishwick & Vining, 1992).

Phenomenology therefore, is the preferred choice of several researchers interested in person-place relationships. There is a plethora of studies that explore a wide-range of issues concerning place, persons and health, from “holistic paradigms of place and health” through people’s experiences in nature (Stefanovic, 2004), understanding the “potential of leisure “to fulfil people’s spiritual needs through time and space (Schmidt & Little, 2005), and Manzo’s (2003) review of literature on the emotional relationships with places encompasses an array of studies based on the phenomenological tradition.

Phenomenology is not merely situated within the earthly realm of place but has found a niche in the sphere of ecology and environmentalism. According to Brown (2003), phenomenology has a lot to offer ecological philosophy with “respect for experience” being integral to it and common to ecologists and environmentalists alike (p. 6). Phenomenological philosophy is one that embraces the “original experience, valuing it and seeking to find an element of truth and rationality” (Brown, 2003, p. 6). What makes it pertinent to introduce this topic here is that it relates to the germ of this study. It is the concern that the built environment is enjoying a prerogative over natural environments in urban areas, taking its toll on human health that drives this dialogue. Some of the ideas presented by leading figures in environmental ethics and eco-phenomenology have been used to provide a basis for discussing the issues that arose in the study. Eco-phenomenology is an innovative investigation into how phenomenology’s contribution to environmental philosophy can answer the grave issues that plague environmentalists today (Brown, 2003).The very issues that disconcert them indirectly impinge on human health in the domain of health psychology.

Going back to the rationale for using phenomenology in exploring peoples’ experiences in nature, it is worth noting the points made by van Manen (1990). He suggests that, it is not enough to merely recall an experience that people have had to a particular phenomenon but it should be evoked in such a way that the fundamental facets, “the meaning structures of this experience as lived through are remembered in a manner that we distinguish this description

as a possible experience, that is, as a potential interpretation of the experience” (van Manen, 1990, p. 41).

van Manen (1990) argues on the view generally held on the lack of practical value phenomenological knowledge generates. Using Heidegger’s words, he says that “it is not what we can get out of phenomenology but what phenomenology can do with us if we involve ourselves intensely with it” (van Manen, 1990, p. 45). Therefore involving ourselves in the phenomenology of natural environment experiences should help us understand better how our relationship with our natural world influences our health and well-being. Our own attitude towards nature may aid in salvaging our natural world while indirectly helping us not only sustain ourselves but also thrive as human beings, on this planet.

METHODS

Field Observation

As Grbich (2007) puts it, observation in the phenomenological approach helps in “bathing in the experience as it occurs- observing the human experience both of yourself and others” (p. 88). Based on the research questions, as to why people seek nature and what they experience within these places, it was important to identify a place where they actually displayed such tendencies with the prospects that it would produce valid data across the areas of the research interests (Marshall & Rossman, 2006) The observation focused on aspects such as: to what extent the park was being used during the day, approximate frequency of use by individuals/people, kinds of visitors it attracted and the types of activity they engaged in. This activity was conducted over a period of three months with two or three hour visits to the park almost every weekday. This strategy allowed me, the researcher to ascertain aspects of people’s behaviour in the natural environments that is usually taken for granted and was informative in determining how people used the park (Morse & Richards, 2002)

As Flick (2007), points out, participant observation does more justice to the notion of qualitative research than interviews which are merely one-off encounters with participants, whereas observation entails a lengthier and more sustained contact with the persons and phenomena of interest. However, this study did not rely entirely on observation for data gathering purposes; it used this method merely to augment and provide a different dimension to the data. Observation involved not just observing by itself, but also blending within the setting as an active participant (Shank, 2006, p. 58), that is, walking around the park automatically made it easier to become part of the milieu without feeling self-conscious about being conspicuous as an observer.

Although the park is a public space, giving people the freedom to engage in activities so long as they do not hinder the other visitors’ enjoyment of the place and is not in contravention to the park rules, permission was sought informally to conduct research. The park authorities granted permission verbally and there seemed to be no concerns with conducting this research and obtaining participants from the park. The aim of field observations was to select potential participants for the study hence it was necessary to first develop a rapport with people which involved engaging in conversations depending on how approachable they were. When people established an eye-contact, greeted or were amenable to small talk, it was extended to a conversation. People who did not show such an inclination were not pursued. Conversations with willing and forthcoming people involved being open about my own thoughts as well as my

feelings about the park, revealing my background as a student researcher and my intentions in visiting the park (Shank, 2006).

The Site

Cornwall Park and One Tree Hill Domain in Auckland were chosen sites for this study. Although these two parks are governed by two different managements, the Cornwall Park Trust Board and Auckland City Council respectively, their objectives are very similar, that of providing green outdoor space to the public for leisure, recreation and exercise ("Cornwall Park," 2006). The parks are adjoining each other and the contiguity conveys a feeling of being a single entity ("Cornwall Park," 2006). For ease of explanation and reference, these two parks will henceforth be referred to as, the park in the rest of the study.

The popularity of the place and its close proximity to many suburbs made the park an easy choice of site for field observations. It was deemed sound to find participants at this single site especially since all the individuals were going to be experiencing the same phenomena under study and would be able to articulate their lived experience (Creswell, 2007). Restricting the observation and subsequent selection of participants to this particular site was also due to the more practical issues of accessibility to the site, availability of an abundance of people and interactions and at least immediate absence of any major ethical or political concerns in carrying out the study (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 137).

The park has a fairly varied and somewhat long history. It was donated by Sir Logan Campbell to the people of New Zealand in 1901 ("Cornwall Park," 2006) Austin Strong, a young landscape architect, designed the park wherein he retained the features of the original landscape and designed it in such a way that it offered passive recreation for people ("Cornwall Park," 2006). The place boasts many mature trees some of which are over 150 years old ("Cornwall Park," 2006). Apart from the landscape and the vegetation the place also has several features ranging from geological features with the volcanic cone and the relics of the volcanic activity, archaeological, architectural, astronomical and agricultural features that make the place interesting and varied ("Cornwall Park," 2006) .The working farm on the site provides a rural atmosphere that people can experience within the city and the sheep and cows roaming free in their fenced off area are a great attraction to the visitors ("Cornwall Park," 2006). With rich vegetation, birds are also abundant and the park organises bird-walks and tree-walks that are popular with nature enthusiasts ("Cornwall Park," 2006) There are many ways to enjoy the park and it is a popular place for walkers of all kinds, joggers, dog-walkers and cyclists, having variegated terrain from flat ground to a steep ascent to the top of the hill, a countryside

atmosphere to wooded areas ("Cornwall Park," 2006). It has sporting facilities which includes cricket, tennis, and archery. It also houses an observatory and has a children's play area ("Cornwall Park," 2006). Barbecue facilities, restaurants and a conference hall are some of the facilities available too ("Cornwall Park," 2006) Therefore the park, with its strategic location in the city, offers varied ways for recreation and being in nature.

Participants

Individuals from this site were of particular interest as they were men and women of varied age groups and ethnicities who used the park in diverse ways. The sampling was purposeful in that there was a specific purpose in selecting participants so that they could provide a comprehensive and complex understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Rice & Ezzy, 2000) ,their experiences in the natural surroundings. Utmost care was taken to ensure variety in the sample in terms of the way the individuals used the park. Participants' ages, gender and ethnicity were carefully considered to maintain the credibility of the findings (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 63). The strategy employed in this study included maximum variation, which is one of the most popular forms of sampling techniques in qualitative research wherein a prior decision is made that distinguishes participants based on certain criteria to gain varied perspectives (Creswell, 2007). The intention was to select a range of park users from leisurely walkers, bikers, joggers, serious walkers etc. from different age groups, preferably varied ethnicities and an equal mix of genders. A snowball technique was also used in that individuals were asked to recommend anyone who they considered capable of providing valuable information and these attempts yielded nine participants which is an acceptable number for a phenomenological research project (Creswell, 2007).

Description of participants

Nine people who took part in the study: six women and three men. The smaller male sample was due to more women being available at the required time for participation and due to time constraints it was not possible to wait for some of the male participants who were either in the process of considering taking part in the study or were out of Auckland at the time. Also there was reluctance among males to participate as they felt they were incapable of contributing significantly to the study or lacked the time to participate. The participants were between the ages of thirty and seventy years. Most of them visited the park to exercise while one of the participants used it simply as route to his workplace and travelled on his bicycle. Another lady participant cycled through the park to work and also used the park for training on the bicycle. Two of the men were ardent athletes who found the park was an appropriate training ground

for the half marathons they took part in. There were two mothers of very young children, who visited the park for the exercise, time for themselves, or as an outing with their children. The rest of the participants walked for leisure, to be alone or sometimes came with family or friends. Some of them also enjoyed the opportunities the park provided to socialise with other visitors. Participants were of different ethnicities, including New Zealand Europeans, Indians, Malaysian Chinese and English. All these people used the park regularly.

An information sheet was given to each participant providing details of the study, their involvement in terms of time and what they were expected to do, their rights as participants and protection of participants' data. After agreeing to participate they were given a consent form to sign which sealed the contract between researcher and participant for the duration of the study.

Open-ended interview

While field observations were undertaken to find out how people used and behaved in natural surroundings, interviews were used to gain access to people's perspectives of natural settings they visited and their experiences within them which mere observation did not facilitate (Patton, 1990, p. 278). What they felt and experienced in the park, what made them regular visitors to the place could only be known through their own descriptions and interpretations of their experiences. In other words, hearing their stories through their own voices gave direct access to their experience (Silverman, 2000, p. 35). According to Patton (1990), qualitative interviewing acts on the premise that people's perspectives are meaningful and noteworthy. It is gaining the first-person accounts of the kinds of experiences they had in the park, that facilitate a better understanding of people's motives to visit it in the first place and the benefits they derive from being in natural surroundings. One of the advantages of interviewing is that they are a source of instant data, allowing "follow up and clarification on the spot", (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 101). Not only is it possible to retrieve participants' lived experiences through words but also through their intonation, facial expressions and gestures in the normal course of the conversation (Kvale, 1996, p. 124).

When it comes to recounting human experience, (Pollio et al., 1997) suggest that it is best to use methods that suit the topic and one that is systematic in its applicability (p. 28). They suggest the use of a dialogic method where the researcher and co-researcher coalesce to discover the life-world of the co-researcher in which they clarify the meanings as it emerges and through the description of the meanings the co-researcher may actually become conscious of the experience for the first time (Pollio et al., 1997, p. 29). This was evident during the

interviews when the participants reflected on their experiences they actually realised what they experienced as if they originally encountered it.

Phenomenological interviewing typically entails an informal practice and uses open-ended questions and even if topics for discussion were developed beforehand to gain an ample account of participants'/ co-researchers' experience of the phenomena they varied with each interviewee, depending on their unique accounts (Moustakas, 1994, p. 114). Interviewees were contacted and a date, time and place suitable for both parties were arranged. The interviews took place in various places from the park, the participant's or researcher's home, cafes, an art gallery and a library. While not all places were ideal for conducting an interview and recording it, on the whole the places put the participant at ease, and almost all the interviews were conducted and recorded successfully.

The participants were notified of the necessity of using the recorder (Kvale, 1996) and all of them were amenable to it although one of them was self-conscious at the sound of his own voice, initially. Recording interviews on a tape-recorder allowed greater eye-contact, provided precision and a high level of detail which memory and note-taking cannot replace (Rice & Ezzy, 2000). Since the recorder allowed eye-contact it was possible to devote complete attention to participants' narrations of their experiences in the park along with observing the intensity with which they recalled some of their experiences rendering a purely phenomenological quality. Some of the disadvantages of tape-recorders are that they are expensive, at least for a good quality one, and that they tend to pick up noise from the surroundings (Rice & Ezzy, 2000). In this study, though the recorder was of a high quality, on three occasions, when the participants insisted on meeting in a quiet corner of a cafe it still picked up significant amount of background noise rendering very poor quality sound. Prior to each interview, the tape-recorder was checked and tested, the name of the participant, the time and date of the interview were recorded, old batteries replaced. An additional recorder was used for every interview after the first interview ended unsuccessfully. The entire interview was written with the help of the participant who realised the recording was almost inaudible due to background noise.

The interview questions were not set in any particular sequence as open interviews tend to be (Kvale, 1996). The topics explored people's intentions and frequency of visits to the park. This was usually followed by the experiences itself and what people felt when they were inside the park. Most of the time participants would continue to talk and reveal quite a lot about their experiences so probing into the same subject would hardly be necessary. Initially there were

long silences as they were trying to re-live their experiences to describe them. However, once they were able to grasp the moment they were able to elucidate the experience. Notes after each interview helped to recognize the extent of participants' willingness to discuss their innermost thoughts, the revelations of their own experiences, review my own tendency to fill up long silences sometimes, in trying to put the participant at ease. These notes also helped in learning from past mistakes and honing my interview skills.

Photo-production

This study also used photo-production as a method to delve into the kinds of relationship and the meanings natural places have for participants. The aim in using photography was to be able to see natural environments as participants saw them and portrayed what they perceived. The photo-discussion component was introduced at the end of the first interview, when each participant was provided with a disposable camera and asked to take between ten to fifteen photographs of any aspect of natural surroundings which had some significance to them. They were also advised that, when not in a public place, they needed to obtain people's permission before taking a photograph, if they were part of the setting. They were given approximately a week to take pictures and return the camera to me. After collecting the cameras from the participants and getting the prints developed the interviewer again contacted the participants to arrange a meeting at a suitable time, date and location to discuss their photographs. These interviews lasted between twenty and forty minutes.

Photographs were used to help understand people's experiences in their life-worlds with an aim of getting a picture of what we take for granted in our everyday lives (Pole, 2004, p. 1). As this author writes, one of the many ways we experience our life-world is based on our capacity to see and make sense of it through the visual cues we get. The phenomenon in the context of this study is the value of the experience in natural environments to health and well-being. Thus, the objective of adding this method was to enhance this study by getting closer access to the original phenomena as experienced by people.

Applied visual method and support for this study

Emmison & Smith (2000) provide useful exercises in the analyses of "lived visual data". They support the use of visual methods in analysing everyday places, some of which are parks and public spaces. They emphasise the importance of the visual in informing and providing a better understanding in terms of how these places qualify as successful places. Stefanovic (2004) led a study on the effectiveness of the Ontario Waterfront Trail as a "natural/urban synthesis". She undertook this project by interviewing "end to enders", (people who traversed the entire

length of the trail) and children between the ages of 11 and 14, to explore their perspectives of the presence of nature in the city and how they would actually prefer it to be. Her study was based on phenomenological inquiry to get in-depth, reflective descriptions of taken-for-granted values and perceptions of diverse landscapes.(Stefanovic, 2004) End-to-enders and children took photographs to describe their experiences of the trail and these images helped broaden the understandings of children's views of the presence of nature within urban milieu (Stefanovic, 2004). This study by Stefanovic (2004) provides adequate support for the use of photo-production in this study. Not only are the topics in both the studies similar but they also espouse phenomenology to explore participants' experiences.

Merits and demerits of photographs

One of the advantages of employing this method is that photo-production is effective in eliciting information as it triggers memory and the flow of information tends to be uninhibited (Pole, 2004). In the first interview there were long pauses and it was noticeable that participants were searching for memories to explain their experience. However, while discussing photographs, they did not need prompting nor were there uncomfortably long pauses. Additionally, photographs are also useful when one wants to portray unfamiliar ideas and objects (Pole, 2004). When people wanted to show certain features of the places they visited that appealed to them, pictures could convey their feelings for the place more effectively than words.

Photographs could not capture all the sense experiences participants described of the place. The tactile, olfactory or auditory senses could not be recorded in the photographs taken. Participants often commented that it was hard to capture the interesting poses of animals, or the distinctive shades in the tree or a particular mood that the weather created.

One set back was in getting participants to speak about a particular photograph in detail. Unlike the interview they were anchored to the moment in an effort to capture their experience. However, photographs provided an easy escape from the discomfort of having to reflect on the experience by allowing them to move on to the next one. Since photographs seemed to speak for themselves in many cases, participants did not feel the need to add anything else to it and so moved to the next photograph. They also replicated photographs which provided little scope for insightful in-depth descriptions. The failure of this method can be attributed to a combination of the above, some participants' urgency to finish the interview and the researcher's own inexperience. This method did not succeed to the extent desired and

therefore photographs did not play a major part in the analysis. They are however mentioned in the context of some of the participants' discussions of their experiences.

In spite of the drawbacks, generally all the participants enjoyed the experience of photographing and said once they began taking pictures they found they could keep going. They felt that taking photographs with a specific purpose in mind created interest in the activity and most importantly the familiar, taken-for-granted things which unexpectedly manifested themselves in a different light.

Ethics

As a research activity involving human beings, the ethical principles for research with human participants guided this study (Moustakas, 1994, p. 109). Informed consent, where participants were fully informed of the research procedure and gave their consent to participate prior to data collection, total abstinence of any deception, ascertaining a clear consensus between researcher and participant, respecting and recognising participants' confidentiality and right to withdraw were all taken into consideration and applied (Moustakas, 1994, p. 109). Massey University Human Ethics Committee was approached for approval of the study and the permission to conduct the study was granted.

Ethical issues anticipated in this study

Some of the ethical issues raised were: whether conducting a study in the park was permissible, how would this impinge on the historical and heritage sites of the indigenous Maori people preserved in this park, how would the researcher ensure her own safety in the park and whether the researcher had taken adequate steps to ensure the safety of the participants when they were asked to take photographs in the natural surroundings. For the first two issues raised, Auckland City Council which manages One Tree Hill assured the researcher/me that this kind of study would not endanger the place or sites in question and that I/ the researcher had the freedom to take as many photographs and interview the visitors to the park. The researcher was intending to visit the park only during broad daylight and be visible at all times to the public eye and be accessible to immediate family on a mobile phone if necessary. These assurances put the concerns about the researcher's safety to rest. Finally, the information sheet for the participants explained clearly about photographing people in public places and the consent they needed to obtain if it was not in a public place. The photographs, recorded interviews and transcriptions of the interviews were stored safely in the researcher's home where they are accessible only to the researcher.

Date Analysis

Phenomenological context

The nature of the study is such that it probes into people's meanings about using natural surroundings, how they perceive it and what they experience within these places. To talk about their intentions, perceptions and experiences necessitates reflecting; that is bringing the experience to one's consciousness and recounting it. These kinds of musings are quintessentially phenomenological, since it is the nature or meaning of our everyday experience that matters to phenomenology (van Manen, 1990). Phenomenology is also concerned with anything that comes within the sphere of our consciousness and the way we experience our life-world pre-reflectively (van Manen, 1990, p. 5).

Analytical techniques

The analysis process consisted of exploring transcriptions from the first interview and the photo-discussions simultaneously. On the whole, there were eighteen transcripts to analyse. Reflecting on the research questions guided the analytic process (Rossman & Rallis, 2003) in that the people's intentions to visit the park, what they encountered and experienced provided a direction and categories to go deeper into the analysis. A combination of the analytic procedures and techniques suggested by Moustakas (1994) and van Manen (van Manen, 1990) guided the analytic process with their clarity and ease of use.

Phenomenological reflection entails appreciating the essence of the phenomenon and this comprises a "process of reflectively appropriating, of illuminating, and making explicit the structure of meaning of the lived experience" (van Manen, 1990, p. 77). To understand the structure of meaning of the text requires approaching it as "meaning units, structures of meaning, or themes". To accomplish this, the sentences that were interesting and relevant to the experience were highlighted, which is called horizontalising (Moustakas, 1994). From this, "meaning units" were formed which were then clustered into common categories, which were phrases relating some explicit fragment of the data (Rossman & Rallis, 2003) and overlapping and repetitive statements were eliminated on the basis of their pertinence to the experience and whether it allowed abstracting and labelling (Moustakas, 1994).

The next step was to group the "invariant constituents of the experience" that had commonalties with the thematic label (Moustakas, 1994). The "invariant constituents" consisted of how the ambience of the place (the park) affected feelings and what sensory experiences were had. Similarly, phrases describing space and time were grouped under a

common theme and also those that represented others in the park were labelled under another theme. These clustered and labelled constituents represented the core themes of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). Listening to the data several times facilitated getting acquainted with it which in turn enabled thematic labelling (Rossman & Rallis, 2003).

The underlying nature of the themes were the fine, implicit processes giving a direction, “a meaning, simplifying notions, and certain moments in the text;” in other words “capturing the phenomenon one is trying to understand” (van Manen, 1990, p. 87). Reflecting on lived experience then becomes reflective analyzing of the structural or thematic aspects of that experience and there is a method to the way the structures that govern the phenomenon are unravelled and described, seeking whatever is integral to the lived experience (van Manen, 1990, p. 78). According to van Manen, (1990) making sense of the text and composing a theme is not meant to be done as a statutory method rather a “free act of seeing meaning of meaning” of lived experience (p. 79). The idea of themes, adds van Manen (1990), is only a way to find one’s bearings in trying to move towards the goal, which is to bring the research together. Hence, themes were established on the basis of the commonalities found in the various experiences of the participants. These experiences seemed to give a holistic picture of the phenomenon which is what phenomenological research is about (van Manen, 1990). The emergent themes seemed to describe the essence of the phenomenon and will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

INTROUCTION TO ANALYSIS

Guided by analytic approaches set out by (Moustakas, 1994) and (van Manen, 1990) the findings are discussed based on the themes that emerged. No specific phenomenological school of thought is followed, however these analyses have included and incorporated existential (Langer, 1989; Ponty, 2004), transcendental (Moustakas, 1994) and hermeneutic (van Manen, 1990) ideologies.

The four major themes that surfaced described participants' experiences of natural surroundings. People's perceptions and experiences of the park/natural environments were diverse, yet, despite all the diverse experiences, there was a sense of commonality in the way they encountered the park that became explicit. Stepping out of the data helped identify these commonalities, putting the entirety of experience into a clearer perspective (van Manen, 1990). The commonalities then shaped the structure of the analysis and brought to light what appeared to be the essence of the phenomenon, which is experiencing well-being in nature. While the photo-discussions were also part of the analysis, no in-depth description emerged from those interviews of any particular photograph. However, some extracts that were interesting and relevant to the topic were explored and discussed, even if they did not focus on a photograph as such. These few extracts revealed the relationship to the space or their feelings and experiences about a certain aspect of the park that augmented the particular discussion, for example the way Tina used a special spot in the park to experience the sense of space that had therapeutic value for her or how Ajax saw other people in the park and how he identified with them. These discussions did not centre on the photograph but provided an "extension of the context in which they were created" (Pole, 2004). Hence, the text that was considered in the analysis from the photo-discussion were significant because of the meanings which were unique to each of them and the photograph merely conveyed one aspect of it.

Topics related to the experiences of the senses, space, time and other people were grouped under four major themes. On finalising these themes, one interesting coincidence was discovered. The four themes were germane to the "four fundamental existential themes" or the "fundamental life-world themes: lived time, lived space, lived body and lived human relation" which form the basis of how people experience the world albeit differently, thereby providing a direction to the research process" (van Manen, 1990, p. 101-102). These "four existentials" encompass the way people experienced the park.

One of the main themes that developed in the course of the analysis was in the way people experienced the attractiveness, ambience and aesthetics of the park, stimulating their senses. Hence, the discourses relating to these experiences were assigned to a theme the title of which was justifiably, sensory experience. Being in nature directly impacted on people's senses and formed the elemental experience of the park. Phrases such as "lack of manmade sort of thing" and "stepping into the place, it is a completely different feeling and cares of the world dissipated" and "the different shades of autumn" described the way they experienced nature in its pure form.

The other subject that participants frequently referred to was space. Participants spoke of space in a variety of ways and forms, ranging from the expansive physical space to the psychological and personal space. Therefore, space formed one of the core themes. When participants made allusions to space, they also spoke of time, that is, in describing the experience of space, they also invariably spoke about it in terms of time or vice versa. People talked of the distances they covered and spoke in terms of the time it took or even though they walked for a long time they said that they did not realise the distance they had covered. There was a significant interrelation between the two and it was deemed appropriate to combine them within one theme. Hence space and time constituted another aspect of the experience.

The park being a public space, other people using it had an impact on participants in several ways. The other users of the park provided opportunities for socialising for those favourably inclined, while for participants who did not prefer to socialise, the people in the park were just part of the setting. On the one hand there was a sense of safety in the number of people in the park, yet contrarily some people made the place unsafe with their behaviour. On the whole, other people had a significant impact on the experience of the place positively or negatively. While the positive feelings engendered by others in the park has a taken-for-granted sense, incivilities towards others and nature seemed to be more noticeable and these had a larger impact on people. Studies related to "person-place" dynamics have come to recognise that people are emotionally attached to places which they uphold as "sacred" and when they sense something is "out of place they feel emotional irritation" depending on the extent of attachment to the place (Seamon, 1984, p. 757). Therefore, this topic covered moral and ethical behaviour in natural surroundings.

Finally, while these discussions were related to the "four existentials", space and time were combined in one analysis as the two were inter-related as mentioned above. Therefore, the

analysis constitutes three topics of discussion. Excerpts and quotes from participants' experiences which were relevant to the theme and had a dense/rich meaning were selected and interpreted according to the phenomenological tradition. These interpretations were supported as much as possible by phenomenological theories and evidence from studies. These levels of analysis provided the basis for interpreting the phenomenon and providing a robust argument from a health psychology perspective. It is envisaged that this will engender a deeper/better understanding of the influences natural surroundings have on human-health.

SENSORY EXPERIENCES

The immediate experience participants had when coming into contact with nature was that it aroused their senses. When asked what they experienced in the park or other natural locations they visited, the most recurrent discourses were on the sights, sounds, smells and other sensations of nature. “The daffodils look lovely under the big oak trees”, “lovely fresh air”, “fluttering leaves”, “and sounds of sheep calling”, “sound of water”, “smells of silage” were some of the descriptions of what they experienced when they were in natural places.

Although nature appealed to their senses in various ways, it was hard for them to describe it in more detail. They struggled to linger in the moment and articulate their feelings. This is revealed in the participants’ own words, when they said, “I don’t even realise why”, “it’s hard to articulate why”, “it’s so hard for me to say what I feel when I go there”. They would pause for a long time and think intensely with a distant look in their eyes which revealed they were clearly finding it difficult to retrieve those experiences and find words to express what they felt. They would instead eulogise the park, or deviate to other aspects of their experience such as being in a good mood for the rest of the day but they could not stay in that moment and describe it. At the most they would offer a fleeting explanation. “I don’t know how to explain, my mind is fresh when I go not only to Cornwall Park, even other places” (Tina). “Words cannot explain why you feel so relaxed sometimes you are out, look at the cows, sometimes the birds flying, you feel relaxed” (Sandy).

Phenomenological background

This tendency to “reflect on lived experience” is essentially phenomenological and “phenomenological reflection is retrospective” (van Manen, 1990, p. 10). It is not surprising that participants found it hard to encapsulate this sort of experience clearly and as (Pollio et al., 1997), say “the experience of experience is difficult to capture in a clear way precisely” since “describing the human world on its own terms is at least as demanding as living it in the first place” (p. 27).

This elusiveness of recalling the experience can also be attributed to the fact that we perceive across all our senses simultaneously at all times, since we tend to be bombarded by a multitude of events every day, and everyone experiences some crisscrossing and “intermingling of senses, which is termed, synaesthesia” (Ackerman, 1990, p. 290). However,

after some time, despite the challenge in communicating the events, some participants ventured to recapture them either by making the effort to delve deeper into themselves or because they were inclined to indulge in sensuousness in their everyday lives which enabled them to access their experience easily.

Recalling the experience

Ted was one such participant, who stated that he did not make a conscious effort to sit in the park because, it would feel “contrived “to go on a Sunday with the purpose of “recreating”! He would, he said, if he “had a partner and kids” .However, when he did use the park merely as a quicker way to get home from work at night on his bicycle, he would engage in some childlike act,

“Sliding through the markings on the road, in a pointless sort of....I suppose indirectly it’s a natural environment. I enjoy the motion and the weaving sensation; it’s done for a purely sort of undefined reason. You get far more sensation when you are on a bicycle but when you drive through the park you may not take it all in. On a bike everything is heightened, the wind comes in a rush because you are on a bike, you are contributing to the movement sometimes the bike feels like an extension of yourself” (lines 52- 58).

“It gets quite eerie at night it’s very dark and there’s no light. It heightens the sense of movement you know, you are straining through the darkness. It’s not scary or anything, again it introduces a different sort of mood because you are in a very dark sort of place..., your vision is reduced and you become feral. It’s not total sensory deprivation suddenly you are in this very quiet place. GreenLane West is a very busy place and you are more concerned about looking about you but suddenly you come into this space and BANG! Things are heightened in a different way; it’s such a contrast you know, amount of traffic and sudden lack of it and the darkness .Its dark. It’s really, really dark, you know, no one’s around. It’s quite isolated, you know. In a way, I find its quite stimulating something like a cat, a predatory creature, you are wary of the environment. You are far more aware of smells and everything” (Ted,Lines. 64-74).

This rather long and interesting narrative that Ted offered was chosen as he was one of the few participants who managed to elucidate the entire experience of the event. Describing his

“pointless” action, he is able to experience the moment fully, probably because of the absence of any specific goal and subsequent need to concentrate on it. The action itself becomes the main focus thereby engaging all the senses. Since the bicycle is not an enclosed space it provides an intimacy with the environment. The sense of freedom of movement that the bicycle allows helps in meandering through the markings on the road with ease. When he alludes to the bicycle being an “extension” of him, it suggests his adroitness with it.

In the second passage, Ted describes the feeling of being in the park at night in total darkness. He is not scared or threatened though it is pitch dark. To find his way through the blanket of blackness means he has to suddenly rely on his hearing, smell and instinct. There is a constant anxiety of having to stay clear of traffic but in the darkness of the park that fear dissipates replaced by a different kind of alertness and other senses coming into full action. There is a sense of confidence in tackling the situation, when he says “it is not total deprivation of senses” or “it’s not scary”. By referring to himself as becoming “feral” or “predatory”, he suggests that the primal instincts in him are aroused, to orient him and move through the darkness.

Theoretical background

These narrations reveal that just by paying attention to one’s senses an ordinary experience can be transformed into an extraordinary one. The animation in his voice and the unceasing flow of words as he drew out the whole experience showed that he derived considerable pleasure from this simple and spontaneous act. As he narrated this experience, Ted realised that he invariably took the route through the park to return home in the night, so he tended to engage in this act frequently. This repetition of the act can be attributed to the feeling of enjoyment that it produced. In Milton’s (2002) discussion of “enjoying nature through experience” and drawing on Izard’s theory on the role of emotions on perception, she states that, if something gives us pleasure we tend to give it more “attention in the hope of prolonging or repeating the experience, thus the intensity of interest is influenced by the intensity of other emotions experienced” (p. 65). Further, referring to Izard’s citation mentions that, based on evidence, the chances of recalling a task/event are higher when the task/event is enjoyable and highly interesting (Milton, 2002) This is true in Ted’s case. He was able to recall the experience with ease as the event was enjoyable and interesting for him. This is not to say that the other participants did not enjoy or have interesting experiences in nature. They probably did not engage their senses the same way Ted did.

In addition, exposure to the constant stimulations of city life is inevitable for urban dwellers, and fatigue from directed attention has detrimental effects on health (Kaplan, 1995). Consequently, a change of environment especially natural ones, which have restorative effects (Kaplan, 1995) provide fresh sense experiences which makes us more responsive to our environment (Ackerman, 1990) and not reactive as Ted felt on the street attempting to avoid traffic.

Naturism's perspective of sense experience and health

At this point, it seems relevant to draw on Morris' (2009), article on Hans Suren's work, *Man and Sunlight*. This paper conveys the importance of "sensory perception to naturism" and the beliefs "values", and meaning of the human-nature relationship held by naturists (Morris, 2009, p. 284). According to Morris (2009), naturists closely identified with "phenomenological approaches" to human experience in their criticism of positivistic thinking and the limitations of contemporary science in failing to look at human existence from a broader perspective (p. 289). Like naturism, phenomenology emphasised close physical "contact with, and experience of, landscape and aimed to reveal how senses of self and landscape are together made and communicated, in and through lived experience" (Morris, 2009, p. 286). "Sensory perception, emotion, everyday attachments" were important to how humans "encountered", grasped and reflected on their "experiences of space and place" (Morris, 2009, p. 289).

Naturists lamented that the urban environment with its relentless and harsh stimulations desensitised humans so that they have become incapable of responding to new sensations in a healthy way, and the confined spaces devoid of fresh air and sunlight were highly unsuitable for human existence (Morris, 2009). Therefore, according Suren, explains it is only through exposing our body to nature that can we "experience a harmony of the mind, body and spirit" (Morris, 2009, p. 285). While the extent to which naturists interact with nature may seem rather extreme to most of us, simply being in nature and engaging all our senses may be sufficient to foster our well-being. "19th century, American naturalist Henry Thoreau" who keenly pursued "sensuous experiences" because of his love of nature, honed his senses to such a extent that he could perceive sights, discern sounds, smells and sense minute changes in temperature that others could not notice (Morris, 2009, p. 291). In this way he was more aware of the world around him in all its nuances and this provided a great sense of gratification (Morris, 2009).

Sensing in Health psychology

Sensations encompass a broad range of issues that are relevant to health psychology, some of which are somatic interpretations (Cioffi, 1991) and pain management (Astin, 2004), that are applicable here. Pain management strategies include “active distraction by external events or absorbing tasks such as viewing slide shows, waterfalls or proofreading” which has known to alleviate physical discomfort and psychological anguish associated with pain (Cioffi, 1991, p. 27). Mind-body therapy for management of pain which includes imagery, and meditation and relaxation techniques, improved recovery time and reduced post-surgical pain (Astin, 2004). As (Hartig et al., 1991) noted natural environments had more restorative effects as compared to urban milieu whether it was in the actual setting or just a simulated one. Therefore these empirical evidences reiterate the point that the strategies employed by pain management techniques such as visualisation or imagery do help in reducing pain. These studies show that there is a direct link between natural settings and physical and psychological health even through simulation. Therefore, being in nature would have more beneficial effects with the exposure to the diversity of sense experiences it offers. Having said this, we cannot neglect the influence of psychological, social, cultural factors in perception and interpretations of sensations (Lyons & Chamberlain, 2005).

Sensing, awareness and mindfulness

Extending this topic of discussion, Ackerman (1990, p, xviii) and Kabat-Zinn (2005) state that some of the well-known “sensuists” were actually those devoid of several sense organs, one of whom was Helen Keller. However, she sharpened her other senses to such a high degree that by simply placing her hand on the radio, she could distinguish between the sounds of cornets from that of the strings to enjoy music. Then again, as Kabat-Zinn (2005) says, it does not mean that only a loss of such magnitude should compel us to extend our “sensorium” (p.189). Instead, he suggests, if we stop ignoring our senses and devote more attention to them we can achieve a fuller life. This he says is possible through the practise of mindfulness, which has healing and health enhancing qualities (Kabat-Zinn, 2005). According to this author,

“Mindfulness can be thought of as moment to moment, non-judgemental awareness, cultivated in paying attention in a certain way that is in the present moment, and as non-reactively, as non-judgementally, and as open-heartedly as possible” (p.108) .

Mindfulness, a recognized form of integrative medicine was founded by Kabat-Zinn, involves meditation and yoga through a cultivation of awareness to reduce stress (Kabat-Zinn 2005). Mindfulness has come to be used widely for a range of issues related to health other than

stress-reduction. It is also applied in reducing obesity among individuals who have eating disorders (Kristeller, 2003). A 9 week research programme, MB- EAT (Mindfulness Based Eating Awareness Training) using structured experience with mindful eating and other meditation practices substantially reduced compulsive eating in people with eating disorders at the same time alleviating depression and enhancing a sense of self. In this sense, it is possible to see how our sensory experiences and cultivating awareness are relevant to health psychology.

Mindfulness and natural healing

Sandy, one of the participants and a regular visitor of the park, used the park to do “walking meditation”. She said she was, “searching for the things that make her happy and wants to see how well she can achieve it”. She explained that it involved focussing on only one moment at a time.

“In life there are many events, every minute is an event. How you think you can tackle it. You have one big event now. Can you imagine, we have only one event in life? I want to remember only one event, that’s quite good right? Completely remembering only one thing,” (Sandy, Lines. 9-84).

This suggests that Sandy wants to achieve a state of being completely conscious and aware of only the present moment. The present presents many discoveries and understandings of her world that she wants to focus on and make the most of. The present itself is filled with enough things for her to ponder over. By living each moment fully she is savouring it, moment by moment, gaining the maximum benefit from it so that her life is richer and more complete. The “good “she sees is that the experience and learning she believes she will get from this will lead to spiritual growth, consequently better well-being.

This extract from Sandy’s interview reveals that Sandy is keen to enhance her well-being through natural ways such as meditating and being in nature. This implies that Sandy is inclined towards holistic ways to enhance her well-being. People such as Sandy who have “holistic health beliefs, environmental concerns and preventative health practices” tend to be more inclined towards using Complementary and Alternative Medicines which is one of health psychology’s interests (Cartwright & Torr, 2005). Since the use of CAM is increasing for a wide range of health issues, its effectiveness and people’s experience of it forms an important topic for health psychology (Cartwright & Torr, 2005).

Apart from the healing aspects the importance of sensory experiences in nature has also been recognised in pedagogical domain. One of the participants provided some interesting

experiences from her profession as an early childhood teacher which is discussed in the following section.

Experiences of an early childhood teacher

The use of sensory stimulation through natural environments for learning and development has been a basic tenet in the pedagogical domain (Cosco & Moore, 2009). The Montessori and Reggio Emilia approaches to early childhood education highly value the use of natural environments as a learning tool in the learning and development of children as nature provides multiple and complex sensory stimuli (Cosco & Moore, 2009). According to (Stigsdotter & Grahn, 2002), research in landscape architecture, environmental psychology, even medicine and horticulture therapy suggest that the health effects of nature are due the sensory qualities it possesses and the activities that one can engage within them which can “restore a person to a more positive view of himself and his capacities”(p.63). When children and young people have positive “experiences and memories of meaningful occupations or places”, it fosters a sense of “identity and growth” (Stigsdotter & Grahn, 2002).

Two of the participants with young children found many benefits through exposing their children to natural surroundings on a regular basis. Tina and Simi who took their children to the park or natural settings regularly found that they not only tended to be more inclined to physical activity but also showed more patience and perseverance which activities such as climbing a hill demands. According to Tina, her normally enthusiastic, sport-oriented daughter complained of boredom and fatigue doing the cross-country events at school which takes place on the city streets. However, she showed untiring zest when it came to cycling up the mountain top or running and walking within a natural milieu. Tina, who is also an early childhood educator, found natural settings to have calming effects on the children she was around. As part of the school’s learning programmes involving exposure to range of sensory stimuli within natural environments she visited the local park with her preschoolers. Tina said that the children were taken to the natural setting,

“Just to listen to the sounds of the cicadas, the leaves, you don’t have to tell them to be quiet. Somehow they just calm down and they are listening when we talk about the spring and autumn. There’s a little hillock we go to, then they have a big run. Then they have lie down and listen. There is a group of boys who are disruptive in the classroom but become the opposite when they go out. But parents have said they’ve not seen it yet because they’ve always taken them to structured areas like malls. I don’t know what it is but there is

one kind of calmness that comes when they are in these settings” (Tina, Lines. 119- 130).

The children in Tina’s class seem to automatically calm down as the sounds and other sensory stimuli of the natural setting hold their fascination. The teachers do not have to persuade them to listen because the effect of the environment seems to make them attentive and interested. This suggests that sensory experiences in nature are both energising and calming and reiterates the philosophies of the early childhood programmes that natural surroundings foster learning and development.

As van Manen (1990) states, “the space that we find ourselves in affects the way we feel” (p. 102) Contemporary constructions may overwhelm us with their size while out in the open natural spaces we may feel a sense of freedom. Children, as van Manen (1990) mentions, probably experience space differently to adults. They probably feel confined in enclosed environments causing the restlessness Tina reported and the open unrestricted space of the “hillock” gave them a “kind of calmness”, she witnesses when she takes her class to the natural area.

While on the topic of children’s contact with nature and the benefits observed by parents and teachers in this study, it is significant to raise the topic of children’s pre-occupation with technology. One participant, Jenny, made an interesting comment that she heard from a lady in her group which fits in with the current discussion as well due to the phenomenological background of this study. Jenny quoted the lady in her group as saying,

“Kids don’t get quiet time at all. They are always using the iPod, the computer, the TV. We do not have to keep doing things all the time. We are human beings not human doings (Jenny, lines 20 23).

According to van Manen (1990) being is the “fundamental existential” state from which we “experience our different life worlds” (p. 101). So, how does being in “different life-worlds” at different times of the day such as life-world (van Manen, 1990) of television, the iPods, computers, mobile phones portend for children’s being in connection with the real world that they actually dwell in? When children are constantly engaged and exposed to technology does it mean they will identify with that world and give preference to it as noted earlier in the study by Stigsdotter & Grahn (2002)? What will this mean for the future of natural surroundings, for the health and well-being of the humans and for the future of nature and mankind itself?

In conclusion, when asked to reflect on what they felt in the natural surroundings, participants said, they could not explain what they experienced," it was the "hardest part". The experiences were taken for granted and we sense things around us without really reflecting on them. This was evident in participants' reports when they said, "I never stepped back and thought why I feel nice, you just feel nice". From the discussion above, we noted the array of stimuli that our senses come into contact every day makes distinguishing and then describing experiences challenging. City life also contributes to the cornucopia of stimuli and while we are mostly engrossed in living out each day, we tend to lose our ability to reach out to the finer senses we possess. Participants felt that if they wanted to get away from the busyness of life," have rest, that's a perfect place, no phones". Participants did not really realise how busy they were until they" went to the park". It was not the "physical part" of being busy but also the mental as in the "thoughts".

Naturists and naturalists promulgate that indulging our sensory perceptions in natural settings regularly has many benefits to our wellbeing (Morris, 2009). Tina, one of the participants declared she had not realised the complete value of being in nature till she was asked to reflect on what she felt there and how she benefitted from it. She said, "After having reflected on all this maybe I'll increase my trips". Sensory perception, experience and awareness play a significant role in health psychology because the discipline deals with how we sense changes in our body, "make sense of the physical symptoms" and becoming aware of them to seek medical attention is crucial to our existence, (Lyons & Chamberlain, 2006, p. 13). Awareness also plays a part in how we view our own poor health behaviours and make the necessary changes to achieve better health outcomes (Lyons & Chamberlain, 2005, p. 13). Kabat-Zinn (2005) promotes the practise of mindfulness to increase our sense of awareness. Awareness and consciousness are also rooted in phenomenological thinking forming the basis of existentialism (Pollio et al., 1997). Considering that we are conscious beings which comes from being sensate, it is only logical to understand our senses before we understand consciousness (Ackerman, 1990). The advantage of being in nature is that, while it ignites our senses it does not actually intimidate them (Milton, 2002).

SPACE AND TIME

The many forms of space

While the park as a natural place evoked several sensations, stimulating, soothing, relaxing and rejuvenating all at the same time, the park was also experienced as space, a space that held several connotations for the participants. The “spaciousness” or the “openness” was one of the most appealing features of the park to the participants. According to them, space was “very valuable” which some of them said they “somehow seemed to need a lot of,” and “some people seemed to need it more than others”. One of the participants could “see the freedom” in the openness of the park. These interpretations of space were varied and far-reaching. The depictions of space ranged from the less accessible, “seamless” space, the “distance”, “the horizon”, to the more proximate space that provided the privacy of “psychological space”, where one could “actually have individual space and freedom”, a place one could go to enjoy the “quiet kind of individual experience” or seek the seclusion of the “secret space”.

Space was also described as providing clarity through “organised space” giving one perception of where one is, a sense of orientation. Space had a sense of being taken for granted as in “being in the space that we have”, suggesting its primordial existence and when space was perceived on a “human scale” it had provided a different experience of being and navigating within that space. Thus the several perceptions of space provided by the participants resonate with Langer’s (1989), commentary on Merleau Ponty’s phenomenological description of the body in the context of spatiality. According to Ponty, she explains, “the primary condition of all living perception is spatial existence” (p.9). In Davis’ (2004) translation of Merleau Ponty’s *World of Perception*, describing the relationship between human beings and space, Ponty pointed out that we are beings who are not totally “disembodied from a distant” entity which is space, but beings that occupy and interact with the space we live in (p. 55).

Interactions with space

The different ways the participants perceived space and the openness in the park were analogous to the way they approached and experienced the park. The park was considered as a separate place away from the humdrum of the home and the pressures of workplace giving them a chance to be with themselves, to reflect alone; on the other hand, it also gave them a chance to mingle with the other visitors in the park, maybe make friends, be with family and

friends or play with their children. This place also allowed them to be themselves where they were able to let go of their self-consciousness, indulge in “singing”, “just making noise or scream” or “become playful, like a kid” “. It was a space to not only for leisure but also engage in serious exercise.

Sense of space and sense of time

Some of the participants used the park to train for marathons because the hill and other terrain provided enough gradient for a serious workout. The park’s environment is also richly variegated with wooded areas, meadows, the hill and the views of the city from the top, so that moving from one area to the other provided some excitement and people lost track of time. One of the participants favoured outdoor training for this very reason over training on a treadmill or in a gym merely because the park with its varied terrain and landscape presented a ever-changing scenery which was a refreshing replacement of the monotony that running on the treadmill defines. In Ajax’s own words,

“Running on a treadmill indoors, it doesn’t give you the new environment. I mean for ten minutes on a treadmill you are still in the same place, you haven’t seen anything but here you’ve got the opportunity you run for ten minutes and you are in different place .You run for half an hour you are in a completely different place. All this gives you energy and keeps you going and stamina. It doesn’t tire you down, you can keep on going and that’s one of the big reasons why I could do a marathon. I never thought I would do a marathon. I’ve done a lot of half marathons” (Ajax, Lines. 16-23).

In this narration, Ajax refers to the change of space being an important factor for him to pursue running. He is aware of the outdoor environment and the difference in space and time as he is running. The change in scenery seems to give him energy and motivates him to continue running. He is either conscious of the energy flow or unconscious of fatigue but he does not feel like stopping, suggesting that a change of scenery makes it interesting and one can lose track of time. There is a sense of self discovery and sense of achievement.

Referring to Bollnow’s discussions on different aspects of lived space, van Manen (1990), writes, that “objective spaces” are not the same as “felt distances between two places”. A place may be physically close but may feel far because of the hurdles it may present such as rivers or roads to cross; on the contrary, a “hiking track in the woods” presents a very different concept of distance and space. Similarly, discussing lived time,(van Manen, 1990) says, lived time is subjective time as opposed to the time on the clock. Lived time seems to speed up when we are enjoying

ourselves whereas it tends to slow down when we are experiencing boredom or anxiety (pp. 103-104). In these discourses on space there were allusions to time as well making them extend beyond each other. Tuan (1979), disagrees with Booth's notion that it is hard to separate time and space in loco-motor activity but can be done in speech and thought by saying that it is not the case in Indo-European languages and "experience in the real world supports the primacy of both time and space" (p. 391). Participants' discourses where space and time usually accompanied each other, endorses this notion. After all the essence of leisure is space and time for oneself (Schmidt & Little, 2005) which the park is used for.

A few more participants expressed similar sentiments of not being aware of the passage of time while walking in the park or while pursuing outdoor recreation. They could walk longer distances, tended to lose track of time, yet not feel the fatigue. This can be attributed to the relationship between negative affectivity and somatic complaints and the fact that internal sensory stimuli and external environmental cues compete for attention (Pennebaker & Brittingham, 1982; Pennebaker & Lightner, 1980; Watson & Pennebaker, 1989 as cited in Stigsdotter & Grahn). The "competition of cues model" shows that bodily pains and fatigue may vary depending on the amount of external stimuli available (Watson & Pennebaker, 1989 as cited in Stigsdotter & Grahn, 2002). People with high negative affectivity are more inclined to direct their attention inwards and the more interesting external cues there are the less attention is drawn inwards. Joggers exercising in an interesting natural setting have been found to run faster but report a smaller amount of fatigue and physical symptoms compared to joggers running on a boring lap course (Pennebaker & Lightner 1980 as cited in Strigsdotter & Grahn 2002)

Even if one were to look at it from a quantitative angle such as in the studies mentioned above, the participants' experiences in this research substantiate the notion that natural environments influence the way they perceive their bodily sensations and sense of time. This point can be exemplified with one of the participant's perception of the park as a place for walking or training for marathons, which he does. He said: "you get such a variety of scenery and if you are walking its different sort of variety of terrain" (Max)" When asked how he felt when he went there, Max replied," It's not going there it's after you have been there you feel as if (sighs...thinks hard) you feel as if...you've been transcended!".

Quoting Max again, recapitulates this special ability of natural places to sustain people's interest in their activities without feeling bored or tired. Referring to the park, Max remarked that:

“ No matter how often you do it or how often you go there it never gets monotonous .I never find it monotonous and if I stick to the same routes or the same direction , I’ll just ...every second day or every second week go the opposite way around to break it up”.
(Max, Lines, 54-56).

Chapman’s’ (1984), phenomenological study of human experience of time, supports the way peoples’ perception of time changes when they have a number of changes coupled with novel experiences. The study reported that participants generally felt that time during childhood moved slowly because of the number of changes and novelty of experiences (Pollio et al., 1997, p. 110)

Visual space and calming experiences

In all their diverse descriptions of space and their use of the space in the park, a common theme emerged, about favourite spots in the park. Talking about this particular place in the park, which Tina happened to show in one of her photographs, she described the significance of this space and the positive feelings it engendered.

“...One place where I like to sit ...this is higher here...I’d like to sit and think there because you can see the whole lot what’s happening everywhere and yet be detached and so it was nice. I was here ... sitting here. You can sit here and look all around everything ... from this point It’s nice (Tina, Lines, 85-89).

What provokes interest here is that nuances in people’s actions in the way they seek nature tend to correspond closely. Sandy and Ajax also found that by seating themselves on the high-ground they could gaze into the horizon endlessly which suffused them with stillness and bestowed a calm feeling. If other participants had been queried regarding this tendency perhaps it may have been possible to know whether they too absorbed themselves with landscapes in the same way. The other reason this context merits discussion is that these experiences are imbued with phenomenological undertones providing a firmer foundation of the philosophical ideologies this study has adopted According to Langer’s (1989) commentary on Merleau Ponty’s phenomenology of perception, in the discussion on space, she writes that when something is close to us, our body has complete control over it but if it is distant, it presents itself as a hazy object wherein our hold on it is only a rough estimation of the thing, rendering a limited scope to investigate the object(p.85). In a similar vein, Tuan (1979) writes about our perception of space as “divisible into regions of differing quality” (p. 399). According to him, it consists of visual space, which is the “broad horizon farthest from us and where

objects appear to be small and indistinct” (p.399). The space nearer to us, e mentions, is the “visual-aural space” where objects are visible and their sounds, audible (p. 399). The space that is closest to us is the affective-zone, notes Tuan (1979) and within reach of our senses of smell and touch apart from sight and hearing. He states that we cannot attend to all three zones at the same time (p. 399). Specifically, he adds, “attending to the visual zone in the distance entirely excludes us from awareness of the affective region” (p. 399). This explains why participants reported a feeling of detachment while sitting and looking out into the distant space. The sense of detachment comes from not having an influence over or being influenced by the space. One does not need to react or respond to the space in the distance as it is not within our control neither does it have any control over us. Therefore participants’ seeking these strategic spots is a way of cutting themselves off from those spaces where they may be forced to interact. In this way it is possible to attain a detached feeling, which means they do not have to do anything but just watch or gaze, as the world goes by. These spaces served important psychological needs of people, offering them a chance to be in a space and time to detach themselves from those emotional spaces to “clear their minds”.

Pressures of time, scarcity of individual space and need for tranquillity

While some participants took advantage of the higher ground to distance themselves from stimuli to seek stillness and calmness, some others sought the “individual space” within the park. All the participants at some time during the course of the interviews said that they visited the park to get away from the domestic demands and preoccupations of work. Nearly all the participants expressed the need to rejuvenate and seek tranquillity. The park afforded them that individual space as it “did not demand anything” of them. Entering the park, made “the cares of the world dissipate” and they were “ready to go back and tackle the world”

The following two excerpts from interviews suggest how people use the park as the kind of space and why the experience has implications for health.

If you are at home.... your mind is on the house-hold things, when you are away you leave everything and have sometime for myself, you feel good you have done something for yourself” (Simi, Lines, 22-24).

“The park is essentially a place where you can actually have some kind of individual space and freedom really. Somewhere we don’t have the busyness and interaction of other people necessarily. It’s very pleasant to walk through the park without having to

talk to a whole bunch of people. The park is sort of different kind of place I go to have that kind of quiet and individual experience” (Cathy, Lines, 29-32).

From these excerpts it is evident that people are being weighed down by pressures on their time and space in daily life. Not having a chance to seek ways to obtain that space and return to their daily duties, with renewed energy, has implications for their health and wellbeing. (Buckowski, 1972) captures the reality of modern man’s existence in his poem, “The Shoelace” the gist of which is:

*It’s not the large things that
Send a man to the madhouse...
It is the continuing series of small tragedies...
Not the loss of prized possessions
But a shoelace that snaps
With no time left....*

The nature of modern mans’ existence is portrayed here. There is also a growing body of literature on research that is focussing on the significance of minor everyday hindrances and chronic anxiety to health and wellbeing. Minor everyday hassles exude greater impact on health than major life events and there has been growing interest in this phenomenon, compelling researchers to shift their focus into exploring the potency of everyday hassles on health and wellbeing (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984 as cited in Chamberlain & Zika, 1990). While everyday hassles are existing problems and are incidents that need dealing with right away such as minor incidents or accidents hindering our everyday lives, chronic stressors represent a constant threat or interference to daily routines (Santana & Nogueira, 2008). These authors studied the unique and interactive relationships between chronic stressors and daily hassles to psychological distress and found that chronic stressors intensify the link between daily hassles and psychological distress. Both these kinds of stress individually and jointly affect psychological distress (Serido, Almeida & Wethington, 2004)

Taking this further, and looking at the excerpt from Kathy’s interview, even though the park is a peaceful setting outside the routines dictated by home life and workplaces ,the park did not count as a place for meaningful social interactions, at least for her. There were some who thrived on the opportunities the park presented for social interactions. Nevertheless, Kathy is not alone in her desire to have the “individual space and freedom”. This need for tranquillity is increasingly shared by many people in the modern society due to the breakthrough in technology and the surfeit of smart devices that have come to dominate the daily lives of

people, making it easy not only to reach people but also giving easy access to their private information (Godbey, 2006).

These technological trends as well the fact that people are preoccupied between their home and work lives to such an extent that it alienates them from human contact making them insular beings which has implications for both individual and social health (Oldenburg & Brisset, 1982). As these authors point out, the significance of the interactions in public spaces have not been recognised enough. According to them, third places provide novelty and diversity that is different from the predictable atmosphere of the home and workplace (Oldenburg & Brisset, 1982). It provides a “mental balance of individuals” because, as they put it, when people eat they are conscious of “nourishing their bodies”; but when conducting casual conversations with friends they are not cognisant of “keeping in touch with a reality that is always socially constructed and maintained in social interactions” (Oldenburg & Brisset, 1982, p. 280). Langer, (1989) explains Merleau Ponty’s view point on “others and the human world” as saying we “can never have the all encompassing hold on the world; there is room for other incarnate subjectivities, and their points of view complement our own (p.104). Although we may shun the social world, we “cannot cease to be situated relatively to it”, that’s because we are already linked to it through our senses and the “interworld affords endless explorations articulations and fresh discoveries” (Langer, 1989, p. 104)

Therefore, while there are several benefits to reap from seeking and experiencing individual space, becoming excessively precious about it does not bode well for a healthy society and has implications for individuals who seek third places for social contact especially the elderly, who have minimal access to social interactions (Stigsdotter & Grahn, 2002). Field observation and personal experience showed that most people were engrossed in walking or jogging and barely made an eye-contact or showed any inclination to do so. From a researcher’s point of view it was challenging, as one of my purposes in visiting the park was to seek participants by engaging in a conversation. When people create such a reserve it poses a challenge in approaching them. Hence, this could have a negative effect on people who visit the park for a purely social experience.

Therapeutic space

The following quote from Ted’s interview shows how people innately seek natural spaces for therapeutic purposes. This participant says:

“As I told you, back in 1988 I used to go for really long walks .I was in really fragile state ... down to the harbour... was really similar to the scene I was seeing back then. It was 23...21 yrs ago, I was in a really bad way...And now when I go for a walk on summer afternoon and sort of see and go, Hey! Think of all the emotions, real waste of time. I was going for really long walks different area state of mind. Reflect on 22 years I can count on that. On a positive note, you know, I have come out of it and not been a slave to anyone else’s ideologies” (Ted, Lines. 91 -96).

Here Ted is talking about the difficult period in his life and the purpose of going for long walks on the harbour side was to try and alleviate his disquiet hoping that the ambience, the physical activity, the space and the length of time he spent with himself would bring him out of that “fragile” state. The “really long walks”, suggests that either time was weighing heavily on his hands or that he was able to sustain long walks without feeling restless and needing to cut it short. Although he seems to think the time spent on reflecting was a waste he seems to be conscious of the fact that final outcome was positive. He does not attribute his becoming well to those walks on the beach as such, rather that he used his own judgement to get well, and retaining his sense of self.

This passage indicates that there is an innate tendency for people to seek nature for healing. Theories developed in environmental psychology and landscape architecture suggest that health effects are a result of the restorative influence on emotional centres in the brain’s limbic system, caused by the environment, especially natural surroundings and wilderness (Stigsdotter & Grahn, 2002). According to this theory, man is a biological individual, suited to be in nature and within natural surroundings, man is able to react and trust his unconscious reflexes. The way people instantly relax in surroundings such as meadow-like open spaces, or near the waterfront are based on the innate memory-like functions that have had decisive importance for man’s continued existence on earth (Coss, 1991 as cited in Stigsdotter & Grahn, 2002)

Studies indicate that natural environments have restorative benefits especially when fighting off fatigue caused by “directed attention” that comes from processing information (Kaplan, 1995) and the restorative effects of natural environments on their own are greater than a combination of urban environments, natural environments and passive relaxation conditions (Hartig et al., 1991). (Krenichyn, 2006),in her exploration of the role of environment in women’s physical activities in an urban park, NY , USA, found that nature provided ample

benefits to them not only physically, but mentally and spiritually. Some of the things that the park offered them were described in phrases such as “stimulation to the senses, restored mental capacities”, “a sense of freedom” a “chance to achieve a meditative state and “clear out the cobwebs” (Krenichyn, 2006).

So far, the discussions have been purely drawing on the difference natural surroundings make to human health and wellbeing in a positive way. While nature has a significant role to play in conferring health benefits to people who engage in and experience it, ascribing it with virtues as a sole agent in promoting health would be ignoring the depth and complexity of human existence (van Manen, 1990) The following extract from Ted’s interview looks at the complexity and ambiguity that is human existence and experience. The excerpt below highlights the observations he makes of his employers:

“Because of their skewed relationship their daughter is in her forties lives at home, embarrassingly some of the behaviour she....she’s deeply deeply neurotic, I don’t criticise people with anxiety but when you are in that stage when you are locked into relationship you are in a childlike state you know, quite painful to watch sometimes see that. You are living in that most luxurious possible situation you don’t worry about where your meals are coming from but you are still saddled with mental illness problems or physical...the guy next door had chronic neck pain for years hardly moved lots of money but yet his quality of life can be appalling sometimes. Makes me feel glad what I have done in the last 20 years anyway I tackled a really long term problem” (Ted, Lines. 105 -113).

This narration tells us that firstly despite living in lush and luxurious surroundings the person in this context displays unusual behaviour that is obvious enough to be noticed by Ted in his short and infrequent interactions with them, as a part-time employee (revealed in the course of the interview). “Living at home even in her forties” suggests that the person has not been able to move away from the home physically or psychologically, and that it is outside the usual societal norms. The type of relationship described suggests that the person is in a state of dependency and has no freedom, as she is “locked up” in the relationship. He attributes the “highly neurotic behaviour” to the “skewed relationship” between the parent and offspring. The narration conveys the stifling nature of the space the person lives in. Hence, this implies that despite having the luxury of living in natural settings and being in a higher socio-economic status, when individual space is constrained the basic sense of being is thwarted leading to mental afflictions. The chronic neck pain of the neighbours suggests that quality of life is not

limited to money and luxurious surroundings. Ted appreciates his condition/status that he could overcome his long term illness, as he had the individual/personal space to do so, which we can conclude by incorporating the previous excerpt where he says he was “not a slave to others ideologies”, suggesting he was not controlled by other peoples’ thoughts and beliefs.

What is relevant to this study is that health is not the consequence of merely being situated in verdant physical settings. Furthermore, home is also not always a “special space experience which has something to do with the fundamental sense of being” (van Manen, 1990, p. 102). It is probably meant to be, but is not, for many people. In Manzo’s (2003) review of a wide range of literature on the “nature and nuances of peoples’ emotional relationship with places” she explores the gamut of metaphorical usage to describe home (p. 47). She discusses the various phenomenological descriptions of home as “at homeness”, “taken-for-granted situation of being comfortable” to romanticised metaphors such as “haven” and argues that without “recognising the negative and ambivalent feelings related” to home we “risk eulogising this space” (Manzo, 2003, p. 57). The concept of “home as fitting those metaphorical allusions was refuted by (Moore, 2000) as he says we must not ignore the fact that for some people the “home disappoints aggravates, neglects confines and contradicts as much as it inspires and comforts us” (p. 213).

The gist of all this is that when one is locked up in a relationship and does not have the freedom to “be in and for ourselves” as Langer (1989) quotes Merleau Ponty in her commentary on *Phenomenology of Perception*, one’s fundamental existence is thwarted. When the internal world of the Self does not exist or fascinate, what use is a world outside even if it is the most picturesque one? Therefore, we label and take for granted the home or natural settings as caring, healing places. It is the context in which people experience these places that has a significant bearing.

In concluding this analysis, the essence of space and time in relation to how humans conceive, create and experience them is extensive and complex. Having said that, individuals were also surprisingly similar in the way they engaged in and experienced nature. Although, time may assume a hegemonic position in phenomenological traditions, in this study at least, space and time occupied an equally significant place vis-à-vis their implications for health particularly in the context of natural surroundings. The importance of either of them becomes apparent only when it goes out of proportion to one’s needs as illustrated in the participants’ narration. The study also revealed that natural surroundings play a vital role in providing the specific kind of space and time that individuals sought to promote and enhance their sense of wellbeing. In

fact nature with its salutary qualities nurtured the need to experience being in space and time. Even though nature has valuable properties one cannot achieve health and well-being simply by wallowing in it because health and well-being, as we understand them, are holistic given the complex and ambiguous nature of human existence and experiences.

ENCOUNTERS IN THE ENVIRONMENT: AN ETHICAL ENQUIRY

The positive encounters

Moving on from the experiences of space and time, two key factors that influenced the way people recreated and were rejuvenated, other people in the park also greatly impacted peoples' being in the park and experiencing nature.

From the field observations and interviews with participants it was obvious that all of them sought nature and experienced physical, psychological, spiritual and social wellbeing. Majority of them sought the natural setting as a reprieve from daily tasks, for exercise, as a social outing or for the sheer appreciation of the ambience that it offered. Participants used outdoors because, as Ajax said, " I like the outdoors, try to do all my running outdoors when I train for marathons, never one to use the gym, when you have these fantastic outdoors why not make the most of it"(lines, 5-7). Nina, not a regular walker, said she "likes the park for the space, the trees, animals and also people". She was not one to exercise as such but went there when she felt relaxed. Max, another regular visitor to the park, said that the park had so much to offer, so many different interesting things apart from the "trees, birds, animals, there's always people and all sorts of people. It offers a variety of terrain and scenery". Whereas on asking if he visited the Cornwall Park, Ted said he never really visited the park just rode through it on his bicycle .He preferred to use the park as a way to and back from his work because it is a "natural area and there was an absence of the usual man-made sort of thing, it was peaceful and restful" Kathy used it as an "exercise and training route. Yet, she liked the "space, the open extension of space".

Being in nature made people feel, "the energy"; they "derived positives" and they felt like they had "a beauty treatment because the walk causes you to sweat and have good blood circulation," People reported feeling "happy" "connected to the physical sensations of weather, light and the fresh air, which relaxes" and it "doesn't put pressure on you".

Participants also enjoyed watching others in the park pursuing a leisure-time activity. The sight of others engaged in wholesome recreation had a positive effect on others. It was obvious that participants appreciated and valued the healthy pursuits people were occupied in when in the park. In one of Ajax's photograph, he depicts the kind of things people do that stimulate a positive feeling in him.

“I think it’s a father and a son they were playing ball.... they had a game they were just kicking a rugby ball. Yeah, I mean, looking at a father and child playing in an open garden like this makes you feel nice. And yeah, you want to do the same because am sure that gives them a lot of joy and you see things like these, you feel like doing the same”, (Ajax, lines 46-48).

The following extract is from Ted’s photo-discussion, in which he recounts similar feelings about others in the park.

“This is taken on a holiday, like I said, you know, where family groups people having good drug and alcohol free recreation, good responsible sort of recreation. A happy family, saddens me too at the same time I haven’t become completely opposed to the idea of families or anything when it works, it’s a really good thing” (Ted, Lines .14-17).

These two passages from the interviews suggest that Ajax, on the one hand is inspired by the father and son having a game. Seeing them play in the “open garden”, an unrestricted natural space, elicits a positive feeling in him. The normality and naturalness of the act brings out the instinctive feeling between parent and offspring that Ajax identifies with. The activity, though a simple ordinary pastime, “just kicking a ball” is only incidental compared to the pleasure derived from being with each other, as father and son. It was the bonding that was appealing and inspiring to Ajax. By “doing the same”, Ajax expresses that, he too wishes to be able to connect with his offspring in the same way through an activity that both enjoy in its simplest yet most gratifying form, bringing them “joy” in the togetherness.

On the other hand, Ted too appreciates the conscientious ways in which people pursue leisure without the inducement of intoxicating substances. Ted’s photograph of the pleasant time people are having as a family suggests that he values the way people bond as well as the way they recreate in “responsible” ways. It saddens him as he himself has not experienced such family times. However, there is a sense of scepticism when he says that the notion of family is “a good thing” only when it is successful. Unlike Ajax, Ted is appreciative of families albeit in a detached sort of way. Whereas Ajax is encouraged by things people do to bond with each other as family members, the other people in the park are experienced by the participants as those who are present at that point in time but it also takes them to another time, the past.

Phenomenological understandings of the experience of others

According to “phenomenological tradition”, there is a temporal nature to the experience of others and the “person in the present situation is of major” importance (Pollio et al., 1997, p. 129). These authors explain “Schutz’s description in the phenomenological perspective” of how,

“other people are experienced in the four temporally organised worlds which include the immediate world of others known as (Umwelt), world of contemporaries (Mitwelt), the world of the world of predecessors (Vorwelt), and the world of the successors (Folgwelt). Only those in the Umwelt are directly experienced and members of one’s Mitwelt become directly present” (p, 129).

In the case of Ted, however, the persons in the past or the predecessors were experienced as well, when he expresses his sadness of not having had the experience of happy family times that he observes in the park.

Polio et al (1997), provide an “empirical description of the ways individuals experienced other people” (p.141). On interviewing 20 participants on their “awareness of others and what they were aware of in the situation”, they found three themes emerged which formed the essence of “participants’ experience of other people” (p, 144). These themes were, the “experience of relationship (proximity, connectivity and synchrony)” secondly, the “experiences of comparison (similarity or difference)” and finally “experiences of benefit (utility, satisfaction or annoyance)” (Pollio, et al., 1997, p. 144).

What these findings and theories tell us is that firstly other people in the environment affect us on various levels and one experiences and relates to other people based on the particular situation in which the others are located for them (Polio et al., 1997, p.129). Ajax’s urges as a parent were stimulated by looking at the father and son, unlike Ted, who did not relate to families the same way, due to his personal circumstances. This influence of other people in the environment also tells us that parks provide opportunities for people to spend time with their own families in various ways which are fulfilling. Simply watching others behave in positive healthy ways, that is being physically active, developing familial bonds and being in contact with nature (Maller et al., 2005), can encourage others to follow. If “health promotion is, trying to change peoples’ behaviour for health reasons through changing their ways of living and being” (Lyons & Chamberlain, 2005), then providing this kind of space and opportunities for interaction and activities fall under its scope. Further, from a health psychology perspective,

“lifestyle change” means the “choices” people make situated as they are, as social beings and is based on the “realities of their everyday” existence (Lyons & Chamberlain, 2005, p. 74)

Negative encounters in the park

While there were several positive feelings associated with other park users these did not elicit detailed discussions. It was the some of the negative behaviour that provoked participants more significantly. Allusions to these behaviours stood out in some peoples’ interviews as having a considerably adverse impact on their experience of natural environments. For Kathy, the park is essentially a place where people want to get away from the traffic but the irritation she feels is obvious in her narration of the kind of place the park is for her.

What I would like is a change in the attitude of people who drive through the park so that it’s not being seen as an extension of the roadway, that they too are using it as a park, not a throughway....What surprises me endlessly is that when people are walking through the park for instance, they are expected to stop for cars to go by in the park, otherwise you would be squashed .In the park people who are walking should have priority in that area because it’s an area that can be distinct .There are different users of the park, clearly there are people gathering and groups of families for picnics and all that. And that’s not how I use the park and I guess one of the things of being in that kind of space is actually having someone who can understand that other people may just want to use it differently (Kathy, Lines. 17-25).

Some peoples’ behaviour evoked such strong feelings in Kathy that she feels compelled to act to restore the park as a place that provides respite from the hustle-bustle of the city. She finds it difficult to come to terms with the way people use it as any other city street and not as a place that is marked out as a space where people actually should be getting the prerogative over automobiles. She also does not identify with many users in the park who congregate in large numbers, which can be noisy and hinders her purpose of retreating into the tranquillity of the park.

Similarly other participants reported feeling annoyed at some park users’ actions. For Ted, the “amplification of music in the park from a car stereo, struck a negative chord” in him because as he explained if he were to be engaging in “reading a book that would certainly impinge” on the quality of the experience in nature. Apart from that, there were instances where people continued to touch lambs in spite of signs clearly forbidding it, as it caused, mistreating.

Other adverse behaviours reported by participants were vandalism and spotting “a flasher up the hill”.

Moral and ethical issues

These issues force us to enter into the realm of ethical and moral conduct in natural settings/parks and how it affects peoples’ wellbeing. Casey (2003) suggests that the starting point of ethics of the environment is simply noticing that something is amiss which then should lead to responding and acting upon it. Though the full force of ethical action needs following through but without the initial act of simply taking note, he emphasises, nothing can be accomplished. It is this first “glance” that can be very vital to responding to an ethical issue as it accords witness to the incident (Casey, 2003, pp. 187-188). But why is ethics so important here and what is it’s relation to health (psychology) in the context of natural environments? Stefanovic (2004) explains that our existential state as human beings necessitates us to deal with matters of meaning and morality. She adds that ethics is not just a vague, “theoretical enquiry but is firmly grounded in ontological structure of our being in the world, in dwelling and human implacement”, (p. 57).

People’s presence in the park was clearly affected by the adverse behaviour and attitudes of others and devalued their own experience of nature which was evident from the accounts of the participants. Some of the participants were overtly annoyed and disapproving of people’s attitudes and behaviour in the park which their expressions indicated. Phrases such as; “am troubled by road traffic, unfortunately at the moment, it (park) doesn’t quite have the same quality of sanctuary it used to have”, “if you have a car you’re more important than everything, it should be the other way around . It’s tied up with my anger “and the tone noted in the interviews reveal their feelings of frustration, anger and disapproval of some types of behaviour. Kathy feels “protective about it (the park)” because “so many people are wearing it down”, which reveals her relationship to the park.

The above narrations reveal that feelings towards a place are characteristic of some attachment towards it, which is widely recognised as sense of a place (DeMiglo & Williams, 2008). Sense of a place fosters a sense of shared pride and responsibility for the place and is strengthened by a sense of belonging within the community; people tend to react to whatever may threaten the place (Relph, 2008, p. 27). In their review of studies on a sense of place, DeMiglo and Williams (2008) quote Steele’s portrayal of sense of place, in which he says that it not only “influences our mental state (conscious and unconscious) but also how we respond to a place which is conveyed through our actions and emotions” or both (p. 20). That is, when a

place evokes negative emotions in us we are likely to engage in some avoidance behaviour related to that particular place. This means that because of some negative experiences of the place due to undesirable behaviour of some park users, people may consciously or unconsciously avoid visiting the park, which portends serious implications for health.

It has been recognized that environmental experience has implications for well-being (Williams & Patterson, 2008). One way of coping with daily stressors is to engage in leisure activities which provide avenues to relax (Hull & Michael, 1995) however sometimes stressors permeate even these environments, for example, the traffic in the park, people interfering with nature, playing loud music on car stereos. When people have to adjust and cope with stressors even in their leisure environment, it defeats the very purpose of recreating, which is a chance to get away from stressors in the first place (Iwasaki & Schneider, 2003).

Kathy feels that,

“In a place like in the city park, people can perceive things on a scale that’s natural to that scale of a person, you can move yourself through that environment, be it in a wheel chair or someone’s pushing you or you are walking, you still move through it at a pace that your body moves in space not the pace which an automobile moves” (Lines, 66-69).

Kathy’s lines suggest that everyone has an inherent sense of perception and rhythm that is unique to them with which they innately respond to the space/world around them. That is, people navigate the space they are in a way that comes naturally to them. They move at a tempo that is in keeping with their own natural pace that is comfortable and not at the unreal unnatural pace of a machine.

Our movements, according to Lingis (2004) are movements in space and time and our bodies have internal rhythms that connect to the outer world (Lingis, 2004). The author refers to Neurologist Oliver Sacks’ discussion of his patients with Parkinsonism. Lingis (2004) narrates that time and time again, Sacks observed how the natural rhythm restored the movements of his patients, the kinetic melody that is unique to each patient, albeit for a short time. Sacks marvelled at the way his patients who he had known to be immobilised by this debilitating disease, were capable of riding a horse with ease (Lingis, 2004). The sight of any natural movement like running, swimming even if it was simply presented as a visual experience on the screen could elicit the same natural movement in these patients and the severely affected patients could even handle a sail boat effortlessly and deftly but the same patients would be

dangerous with motorised vehicles (Lingis, 2004). The point of this is that people move at a pace that is natural to them, guided by the rhythms and sensations in their body. Their innate pace and movement makes people feel normal and even provides calming effect for them but the unnatural pace, coupled with the sound of motorcars somehow just do not correspond with the natural rhythms of human movement. Therefore, a park is a space where people should be allowed to move at their own normal, relaxing rate to rejuvenate and heal. If people are compelled to compete with automobiles for that space, it augurs poorly for the process of healing and restoring, for which many people seek the park.

Integrated understanding

Reviewing the above accounts, it is clear that every experience in the natural setting is not a positive one. These accounts suggest that people's responsibility (rather, the lack of it) towards each other and towards nature itself has implications for both the preservation of nature and ultimately human well-being. Mention must be made of the contribution of disciplines such as environmental ethics/ philosophy (Foltz & Frodeman, 2004) eco-phenomenology (Brown & Toadvine, 2003), eco-psychology (Fisher, 2002) and environmental psychology (Stefanovic, 2004) in providing a deeper level of understanding of the issues linked to the human-nature/environment interrelationship and the subsequent consequences for health. With their focus on nature, ecology, environment, human experience and health the way these are integrated within these disciplines which make it relevant for this particular project. What is even more relevant is that the confluence of phenomenology and environmental philosophy (Brown, 2003, p. xi) facilitates further discussion on morality and ethics of the environment, mediates people's use of the park which has implications for their health and well-being. According to (Brown, 2003, p, xi), there is belief that nature has value and that it deserves better treatment from us, founded in the experience of nature.

Environmental philosophy is a relatively new direction in the field of philosophy that grew out of increasing environmental concerns that have been plaguing the globe today (Brown and Toadvine, 2003). While it deals with ethical issues on a broader scale and larger magnitude, such as global warming, mass extinction of species, pollution, etc,(Brown and Toadvine, 2003) environmental philosophy doesn't concern itself to a great degree with the incivilities that bother humans in their everyday experience of natural settings. Yet, using Brown's, (2003) ideas one can argue that when people seek nature to enjoy the experience, it is not entirely for their own pleasure. The feeling extends to the fact that they are sharing this common place in the web of life (Brown, 2003). This feeling is echoed by Tina, a participant in this study who

stated, "Thank God, it is there for us and we could be a part of it "and Jenny who said," God has given this for us to enjoy".

In attempting to understand human behaviour towards nature and their own kind within natural settings Maly's (2004) interpretation of Aldo Leopold's, "A Sand County Almanac" provides some valuable insights. According to Maly (2004) Leopold says that human responsibility is related to conscience and unless there is a shift in the way we think, in our allegiance, care and convictions, no significant change in ethics can ever take place, (p. 297). Ethics calls for an awareness and consciousness of being part of a community, "biotic" or human and not being bound by rights and duties or taking a moral position (Maly, 2004).

Finally, to draw out the implications for health in the context of ethics in the natural environment, parks play a significant role in providing opportunities for exercising, recreating, socialising etc. There is a growing awareness that people's health behaviours are directly linked to some of the major health problems of today, obesity being one of the huge concerns with its associated risk factors (Santana & Nogueira, 2008). It is important for park managements to understand that visitors to the park need to feel safe and be able to use the park in a manner that is pleasurable for them. Parks need to consider providing opportunities for people to fully experience the place at a pace that is naturally comfortable for them with minimum interference of traffic. Walkers and bikers in the park tend to feel vulnerable around vehicles deterring them from engaging in these health promoting/ enhancing activities. As discussed earlier, sense of place is linked to psychological wellbeing. When people play loud music, engage in undesirable behaviour, interfere with nature (touching lambs), it goes against the values people uphold, resulting in the loss of a sense of place affecting their psychological wellbeing (Brown, 2003). Therefore, measures to control these impediments to provide an enhanced, wholesome experience of the park/natural environments and keeping it relatively car free will encourage more visitors and ensure better health outcomes for the park users.

CONCLUSION

The most striking feature that emerged from this study was the abundance of numerous disciplines interested in the human-nature bond. While it was understandable to find studies in leisure studies, urban planning, landscape architecture, geography, public health and early childhood pursuing this vital link between humans and nature, it was surprising to note disciplines such as psychiatry (Fisher, 2002; Maller et al., 2005) entering this forum. Just as there are a wide range of fields ardently pursue this topic, there are also people who vary in degrees towards their dedication to nature. From the high-thinking environmental philosophers, eco-psychologists, conservationists to down-to-earth naturists, naturalists and nature lovers, to classify a few, the interest and commitment lies on an extensive continuum. What this implies is that many people value nature in varying shades of “green”.

But why, in spite of the abundance of nature-orientated people, has it become necessary to hold such passionate discussions and debates on protecting and preserving nature? This is because as Booth (1997) quotes Aldo Leopold, “There are some who can live without wild things and some who cannot” (p. 255). Even if this statement is not extended to the “wild things”, the basic attitude that nature is not deserving of much attention remains the same, which we witness in the small yet annoying attitudes of people when “they use the park for amplification of music” or when they “don’t realise others may want to use the park differently” or when they “touch lambs” despite being cautioned and fail to appreciate nature. It is a change in this mind-set that all the crusaders of nature are driving and striving for. So where does health psychology fit in all this and if not earth-shaking, at least what tangible ideas can it put forward?

As the findings revealed, health psychology’s role in its widest scope was salient in the way nature influenced human health. The diverse ways in which people used the park showed that they sought the natural surroundings to satisfy their unique needs. They also subsequently had differing experiences but it was interesting to note how the different experiences all essentially coincided into the “four fundamentals of lived world “using van Manen’s (1990) words (p.101). Though they may perceive the body, space, time and others differently they are inescapable elements of human existence These four fundamentals form the essence of human experience in nature, the essence of the phenomenon, which ultimately is the essence of human experience of nature from a health psychology point of view.

To briefly explain this on the basis of the findings, analyses and discussions, the human-nature interaction to start with, falls under the area of health promotion. To start with the benefits of physical exercise from sport and recreation are well-known factors in promoting health and parks and gardens provide ample space in a natural setting for pursuing these interests (Maller et al., 2005). They not only gain the benefits of being physically active, but also being outdoors in contact with nature, “in touch” with the elements such as “the sun, the wind, rain” which as discussed has several health-promoting qualities (Maller et al., 2005). The physical exercise that people engage in, watching other people involved in activities that manifest as “joyful”, encourages observers/onlookers to “do the same” encouraging people to make “healthy choices”, help people stay healthy (Lyons & Chamberlain, 2006). The park was also a place where the cares of the world dissipate “to come and be quiet and walk, which gives energy” provides a new lease to spend time with my family, have my own time, so able to give them their own time, and get away from the “busyness of our lives” for a while. These micro breaks from routine are therapeutic and crucial as exposure to prolonged stress even if they are minor everyday stressors have serious implications for mental health and wellbeing (Chamberlain & Zika, 1990).

Sensory perceptions played a major role in the way people experienced the park. People felt “relaxed” which they “could not explain”. “Looking at the birds flying or just looking at the animals was calming”. The sights, sounds, smells of nature had a stimulating yet soothing quality, energising and also relaxing effects. This was revealed in the participants’ personal experiences as well as in their observations of their own children and that of others. These findings substantiate those from previous studies to show that nature indeed possesses a unique quality in bestowing restorative and therapeutic benefits in humans (Hartig et al., 1991).

This therapeutic quality of nature is recognised in therapies that involve pain management (Astin, 2004). Pain perception, management, somatic sensations and interpretations come under the domain of health psychology in the way they determine the physiological and psychological health of the individual (Bendelow, 1993; Cioffi, 1991). This can be related to the way participants perceived their somatic sensations and interpreted it while jogging or walking in the park, which they reported was pleasurable in comparison to the boring, tedious routines on the treadmill. The change and novelty they perceived in nature motivated them to keep moving which combines the benefits for physical and psychological well-being. Nature with its therapeutic qualities is used in therapies of pain management and is therefore related to one

of health psychology's major area of interest, pain perception and somatic interpretation (Cioffi, 1991).

Sensory perception and experiences also led to awareness of sensations, which is related to mindfulness. Awareness and mindfulness are again related to health promotion interventions in behaviour change (Kristeller, 2003), a key topic in health psychology. Participants spoke of "walking meditation" that they did in the park, "just doing deep breathing" and expressed their desire to focus on "one event only, the present moment" which is part of mindfulness techniques (Kabat-Zinn, 2005). These discourses suggest that they are inclined towards natural therapies. This again is health psychology's forte as it is interested in the wide usage of alternative medicines and how it determines peoples' health by exploring its effectiveness and peoples' experiences of it (Cartwright & Torr, 2005). These are some of the topics identified in this study as being relevant to health psychology. This research has revealed that there are a range of areas applicable to health psychology in this context, which exerts a greater thrust to preserve and provide more natural environments for people in the urban areas.

Considering that limitations are part and parcel of any study, this research had its own limitations. Firstly, the sample composition was not satisfactory. There were more women and not a very wide ethnic mix. The participants were mostly around the ages of 30 or 40 years. Women were more willing to participate than men as they were less forthcoming and gave reasons such as lack of time to participate and inability to contribute much to the study. With a balance in gender make-up, perhaps the findings would throw more light on how men experience nature and what implications it has for their health. This hesitancy itself reveals the gender difference in seeking healthy pursuits and vocalising their feelings. This is a pertinent topic of study within the realm of health psychology, which is interested in the implications for men's health through the way they engage in health-seeking behaviours. (Addis & Mahlik, 2003).

The photo-production component did not work as well as anticipated or desired due to the factors explained earlier, participants found the reflecting and recounting hard which meant they had to delve deep into the recesses of their mind to bring back the memories. This took time, effort and patience, which many of them could not devote at that instance. Photo-production, had it worked, might have provided deeper insights into peoples' perspectives, understandings and relationship to nature. The other challenge was in accomplishing intense phenomenological understandings in this study considering that it is the first attempt at using this methodology. However, in spite of the afore-mentioned reason and

considering the diversity and vastness of the philosophy itself (Smith, 2009), the principles, concepts, and rhetoric were applied in the best possible way given the limited time in which to put to practice.

Studies that investigate this topic in more detail and on a wider scale may be able find more areas of interest that identify with health psychology. Future studies in similar areas may consider studying people from different backgrounds. It would be interesting to find out how a sample of only youth and/or young adults would experience natural surroundings and how important it is for them to access nature. This study selected people from the park itself, so they were people who actually had a preference for nature but if a study were conducted using people from outside the natural milieu, it would be interesting to note what kind of findings would emerge. Further, experiences of people with pollen allergies and phobias may relate very differently to natural surroundings and their perspectives of nature and experiences would contribute significantly to understanding the complex human-nature relationship. Finally, a sample of policy-makers and decision-makers in building cities would contribute largely to the field and future of environment.

The life world of being in and experiencing nature has several facets to it, the physical, mental, social, and spiritual and to extend it, moral and ethical too. All these have a certain “taken for granted-ness” about it as seen in the study. Since humankind has been historically connected to nature, a world without it is hardly comprehensible. Yet, several studies and this one too, arose out of the fact that several places on the earth are rapidly losing green spaces. While technological innovations and urbanisation cannot be completely disregarded, their usefulness to humankind must be respected and recognised. However, their prerogative over nature only presages peril to the very race, that technology and urbanisation are of any significance.

While philosophies related to ecology provide useful understandings of human-nature relationship and raising consciousness of the need to revere nature for its own sake and our existence ultimately, a practical and more tangible understanding (Fisher, 2002) of how nature works for us in preserving us in mind, body and soul is needed. The forging of phenomenological ideologies, theories of ecologically orientated disciplines and health psychology along with evidence based knowledge have provided a practical ground for making awareness of our crucial connection with nature. This, it is hoped will expand consciousness among policy-makers and decision-makers, change their attitude and actions towards a more mindful consumption of land and thereby awaken us all to a reality of the urgent need to go back to nature.

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Placed on Massey University letterhead.

CONSENT FORM

Natural surroundings, parks and health

I have read the information sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I agree to participate under the conditions set out in the information sheet.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Full name of participant: _____

If you wish to receive a summary of the results, please provide your name and contact details:

Name: _____

Email: _____

Address: _____

INFORMATION SHEET

Natural surroundings, parks and health: Users' perspectives

What this research is about

The aim of this research is to study the importance of natural environments to people. My project seeks to find out why people use natural surroundings, what benefits they are seeking by visiting these places and what they experience when they are within them. Auckland City Council is aware that I am using the park for this project.

The researcher

My name is Malini Malur and I am conducting this thesis towards my Masters Degree in Health Psychology from Massey University.

What you would need to do

If you are willing to participate, there will be three aspects of the research in which you will be involved. Firstly, there will be an interview of approximately one hour, at either the park or a place that is suitable to you. In the interview, you will be asked about your views on natural environments and why you use them. Secondly, you will be asked to take photographs of natural surroundings that are important to you and have a meaning to you. I will provide you with a disposable camera or you are welcome to use your own camera. Please note that the photographs you take might include people who are present in those places. This is fine if they are in public places, however, if you want to photograph anyone who is not in a public place, you will need to obtain their consent to do so. I would like you to take ten to fifteen photographs, and you will have around one week in which to complete this task. Once you have finished taking the photographs, please contact me to arrange for printing of the photographs also make a suitable time and place to discuss the photographs you have taken. In the final part of the research, we will talk about these photographs to give an in-depth understanding of your experiences within these natural settings. This interview will take up to one hour and you may choose to talk either at your residence, the park or at the university.

The interviews will be recorded and transcribed for analysis. As token of appreciation for your time and effort, you will receive a voucher valued at \$ 25.

Your rights

All the information you provide during the interviews will be kept confidential. If the photographs you take include people who can be identified, we will mask their features to ensure they cannot be recognised. All the data (transcripts, recordings and photographs) will be stored in a secure place and no one else other than me or my supervisor will have access to them without your consent. Your name will not be used in the research and any personal or identifying features will be changed to preserve your anonymity. Extracts from the discussion and photographs (with identifying features blurred) may be used in publications and presentations as part of the research process. Once the research is completed, the data will be disposed of.

You should also know you have rights, as stated below:

- There is no compulsion on your part to participate in this study; you are free to decline.
- You may ask any questions about this research before you agree to take part or at any time during the course of the research.
- You can decline to talk about any issue or withdraw any photo you do not wish to discuss during the discussions.
- You can ask the recorder to be switched off at any time during the discussion.
- You may withdraw from the research up to two weeks after our discussion. If you do, the recording of our discussion and your photos will be destroyed.
- You can request for the summary of the results from the research after it is completed.

How you can contact us:

If you have any questions about this study, you may contact either my supervisor or me.

Malini Malur

Mobile: 021 342 851

Email: mvyakarnam@yahoo.com

Professor Kerry Chamberlain

School of Psychology

Massey University

Private Bag 102 904

North Shore Mail Centre

Ph: 09 4140800 extension 41226

Email: K.Chamberlain@massey.ac.nz

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, Application 08/068. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Denise Wilson, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, telephone 09 414 0800 x9070, email humanethicsnorth@massey.ac.nz.

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

Initial interview

- General reasons why the participants visit natural surroundings or frequent the park.
- What features of the park do they find attractive.
- Perceptions and beliefs about being in natural surroundings/ parks.
- What benefits do they derive from coming to the park?
- If so, in what way does it contribute to their wellbeing?
- What do they experience after the visit to the park?
- Does this feeling help in enhancing their life in general, does it have a flow-on effect in their everyday life?

Photo-elicitation

- What are their reasons for capturing the particular picture?
- What is the photograph conveying to them?
- What thoughts/feelings about the photograph do they wish to share?
- What aspects of this photograph hold a special meaning to them/ what significance does it have to them?
- What parts of the photograph do they like or not like? Why?