Nature as Healer: A Phenomenological Study of the Experiences of Wild Swimmers in Kenwood Ladies' Pond on Hampstead Heath

Lucy Sam

Alef Trust and Middlesex University

This phenomenological research explored the phenomenon of nature as healer through the lived experience of wild swimmers at Kenwood Ladies' Pond on Hampstead Heath (hereafter abbreviated as the Ladies' Pond). Five semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore the experience of women who swim there. Five key themes emerged from the data analysis. These were: nature through wild swimming; perception of the place through wild swimming; the physical and psychological benefits of wild swimming; descriptive feeling benefits through wild swimming; and healing through wild swimming. These themes were explored in relation to relevant literature. A textural description was then written to describe the essence of experiences through wild swimming, along with identifying limitations in the research and further considerations.

Keywords: nature, healing, wild swimming

I started wild swimming in the Ladies' Pond (Figures 1-4) four years ago. From the first moment I swam there, I felt a connection to something greater than myself. It was an experience I described as healing. Whilst I was on Hampstead Heath and swimming in the Ladies' Pond, I often asked myself: What is this feeling that I experience as healing? What is it about swimming in the Ladies' Pond that feels so great? What is it about being in nature and wild swimming? Is it the connection with water or nature, or in particular Hampstead Heath, or is it something else?

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Lucy Sam. Email: lucyannasam@gmail.com

Recommended citation: Sam, L. (2020). Nature as healer: A phenomenological study of the experiences of wild swimmers in Kenwood Ladies' Pond on Hampstead Heath. *Consciousness, Spirituality & Transpersonal Psychology*, 1, 34-48.

Between 2011 and 2015, I lived in a property with a yoga studio, in front of a small beach, between the sea and mountains in North Cyprus. One day, after I finished my yoga practice, as I was walking back up to the house, I had a strong sense of feeling connected to and merging with nature. Something was telling me that we are all part of nature and that God is everywhere, in us, and in nature. Time stood still and there was a shift in energy. This only lasted for a short moment, but it was powerful indeed. This experience could be similar to the ‘peak experience’ that Abraham Maslow termed. “It is often through peak experiences that we get glimpses of the world of soul or spirit” (Rowan, 1993, p. 20). Motivated by these experiences I had in nature, the aim of this research was to understand what it is about being in nature that I experienced as healing. To make the research manageable I decided to focus on wild swimmers’ experiences at the Ladies’ Pond.

To provide the impetus for the research, literature was searched in relation to experiences of wild swimming using the following terms: nature, healing, nature benefits, spiritual benefits of nature, wild swimming, open water swimming, swimming and transpersonal experiences of wild swimming. Most of the research has been conducted in the last 10 years. The literature review did not focus on research that specifically considered ‘experiences through wild swimming’. However, it did consider research that had been conducted on physiological, psychological and emotional benefits of being in nature; cold water immersion; benefits of being in nature; and a history of Hampstead Heath Swimming Ponds. As previous research conducted has been mostly quantitative, this provided an opportunity for exploratory research. Following is a review of the literature.

Hampstead Heath Swimming Ponds

Davies and Corney (2012) provide an illustration of the four different ponds located on Hampstead Heath, through photography, archive material and personal experiences. The ponds are managed by the City of London Corporation. According to the authors in the seventeenth century, many rich people moved to Hampstead, following the Great Fire and the Plague. It developed “into a spa town in the eighteenth century as the local spring water was believed to have healing properties” (p. 28). The authors trace the history of the ponds and tell us the Ladies’ Pond opened in 1926, and it “attracts 65,029 visits a year” (p. 132). The Ladies’ Pond is lifeguarded, and as the name suggests it is only open for women. They describe it as a “sanctuary for swimmers” (p. 13). According to Davies and Corney (2012), Piers Plowright, 73, broadcaster and radio documentary producer, stated that “but the ladies’ pond is the most beautiful... everyone rhapsodises about the spiritual and physical side to cold water swimming” (p. 163). Davies and Corney (2012) talk about visitors to the Ponds over the years, which include celebrities, Lords, poets, artists and swimming champions, and give accounts of how the Ponds have often been at the centre of conflict. People have fought at various times to keep them open to the public, and the Ponds have made headlines for being gay and lesbian cruising grounds.

Figure 1
Kenwood Ladies' Pond

Figure 2
Steps into the Ladies' Pond

Figure 3
A bird flying across the Ladies' Pond

Figure 4
Changing room and lifeguard's office at the Ladies' Pond

Cold water immersion

Research in relation to the benefits and dangers of cold water immersion through open water and wild swimming is growing. For example, Tipton et al. (2017) considered the benefits, such as reducing inflammation, and threats, such as heart attack, hypothermia and drowning, of cold water immersion. Haddad et al. (2010) studied participants' subjective benefits of wellbeing and positive effects due to cold water immersion, including enhanced quality of sleep and impact on the parasympathetic nervous system. From reviewing literature in this area, it is clear that current research has mostly highlighted physical health benefits, mood benefits and physical health risks, but not experiences of wild swimming.

Nature contact and nature connectedness

There is a growing body of research in relation to the positive benefits of nature contact and connectedness such as Capaldi et al. (2015). Most studies are quantitative using a form of connecting with nature scale, such as the Nature Relatedness Scale (NR)

by Nisbet et al. (2009), but do not research participants' experiences. The authors introduce the concepts of nature contact (being in or around nature or seeing images of nature) and nature connectedness "one's subjective sense of connection to the natural world" (Capaldi et al., 2015, p. 2). Hegarty (2010) conducted qualitative research into nature connectedness through participants' personal experiences. He explored whether connectedness with nature induced a positive effect on feelings, and captured examples of participants' experiences of nature as self-healing. A theme that emerged for Hegarty (2010) was activities participants undertook in nature which they experienced as being beneficial. Underwater swimming was mentioned, but a detailed analysis of this was not included. References to underwater swimming would have been useful for this research. The research could have benefited from a thematic analysis, as this could have yielded indicative themes for understanding what it is about nature connectedness that participants experience as self-healing. Research by Zelenski and Nisbet (2014) focused on whether there is a correlation between subjective nature connection and other subjective connections such as spending time with family, friends and home environments. Their findings indicate that although there is some correlation between connectedness and happiness, nature connection was rated significantly higher than other happiness/subjective connections, such as spending time with family.

Physical, psychological, emotional and wellbeing benefits of being in nature

There have been studies into the physical, psychological, emotional and wellbeing benefits of nature. Keniger et al. (2013) sought to understand typologies of "interaction between humans and nature" (p. 915) and believe this must be in place for there to be an experience of benefits. They identified typologies as being 'indirect', for example, seeing an image of nature; 'incidental', passing by nature unintentionally; and 'intentional', for example going for a walk in a park or watching wildlife. The authors presented an overview of the positive benefits people report feeling from nature. A range of psychological, cognitive, physiological, social, spiritual and tangible benefits were identified, which include improved self-esteem and psychological wellbeing, a reduction in anger, restored attention, reduced stress and improved cardiovascular health. Martyn and Brymer (2016) investigated the impact of nature on reducing anxiety. The authors used mixed methods: a qualitative question asking participants what it feels like to be in nature, and quantitative scales. The results demonstrated that anxiety reduced as a result of nature connection and seven qualitative themes emerged: "relaxation, time out, enjoyment, connection, healthy perspective, sensory engagement and expanse" (Martyn & Brymer, 2016, p. 8). Hinds and Sparks (2011) investigated associations between experiential feeling states and the natural environment. They found that natural environments were associated with higher eudemonia and apprehension than non-natural environments.

Whilst it is clear that there is research into the physical, psychological, emotional and wellbeing benefits of being in nature, the research conducted has been mostly empirical evidence through literature and a reliance on surveys.

Spiritual benefits of nature

Keniger et al. (2013) refer to the spiritual benefits of nature and report there is little research in this area. They refer to reports on experience, such as feeling connected to something greater, that is “feeling connectedness to a broader reality” (p. 926).

Johnson (2002) describes the spiritual benefits of wilderness and identifies six benefits of connecting with the wilderness that some people experience: the enduring, the sublime, beauty, competence, experience of peace and self-forgetting. He attempts to interpret the psychological reasons as to why these might be beneficial, and links these with spiritual or religious traditions.

Non-duality and the ecological self

There is a growing field of theoretical research in relation to the concept of the ecological self. For example, Palamos (2016) discusses how humans view their relationship with nature and refers to the dominant reductionist view, suggesting that humans see themselves as separate to nature, exploiting it as a means to our own ends. Similarly, Davis (2011) discusses the link between transpersonal psychology and ecopsychology, and the core component of this which he suggests is non-duality. Non-dualists take the view that subject and object are not separate. In the case of ecopsychology the non-dualistic view would be that humans and nature are not separate from each other. Davis (2011) suggests finding ways to re-establish connection with nature as a way of addressing ecopsychologists’ concerns that humans are destroying nature and ourselves in the process. “Conceiving of nature as an expanded, more-inclusive self may be a necessary step in developing a transpersonal view of the human-nature relationship” (Davis, 2011, p. 139).

From the literature reviewed, my own and other people’s experience of wild swimming and being in nature indicated that researching the experiences of wild swimmers in nature is under-researched and worth exploring.

Method

As the focus was on the lived experiences of wild swimmers, attempting to understand the phenomenon of what is being experienced, a phenomenological study as described by Creswell (2013) was conducted. Five participants who reported having experienced the phenomenon were interviewed. The researcher attempted to identify if there was a common theme(s) or experience, leading to a description of the phenomenon. The researcher’s experience was bracketed to remain objective when attempting to understand participants’ experiences. This is important for phenomenological research.

Sampling strategy

Five participants were recruited who identified nature as healing through swimming in the Ladies' Pond. An advertisement did not elicit much response, so the Deputy Chair of Kenwood Ladies' Pond Association (KLPA), supported the process by contacting people directly in her network. KLPA supports Pond users and links them with the City of London who take responsibility for managing the Ponds.

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with all five participants. The sampling strategy and data collection procedures employed were conducted in line with the ethical considerations required by Middlesex University. Prior to conducting the interviews, participants were provided with a copy of the participant information sheet, and completed the participant consent form. Participants were informed that interviews would be recorded, transcribed, kept confidential, and stored securely. I reminded participants to speak directly about their experiences and not provide answers they thought might be expected. I informed participants they could withdraw at any time. After transcribing the interviews, I returned these to participants for clarification and to confirm accuracy. To protect participants' identity, they are referred to as participant One to Five. The interview participants are all white females, aged between 27 and 61. Four participants work and one is retired. One participant was recovering from breast cancer and one recovering from a brain tumour. Three of the participants have children.

Participants were asked two broad questions suggested by Creswell (2013). Firstly, please tell me about anything you have experienced in terms of the phenomenon I have described? Secondly, please describe the contexts or situation that have typically influenced or affected your experience of the phenomenon? In addition, a further 13 open questions identified from the literature review were asked. For example: can you describe the feeling you get from wild swimming in Hampstead Heath Ladies' Pond? What feelings does it evoke? Please describe what you think contributes to the healing experience? Is it the swimming, nature, a combination of both or something different? Interviews were recorded as voice memos and transcribed verbatim. Sixty minutes was allowed for each interview, but on average they took 20 – 30 minutes. Due to participant availability, three were conducted in person and two via Skype.

Data analysis

Thematic data analysis as described by Creswell (2013) was conducted. This involved immersion in the data over seven weeks to look for salient points, highlighting statements that referred to the Pond, swimming and participants' experiences of the Ladies' Pond. Creswell (2013) refers to this as horizontalisation of the data. Comments outside of the context and experiences of swimming in the Ladies' Pond were omitted.

Subsequently, highlighted significant statements were copied into a table for each participant. From this, 187 significant statements emerged. Key words were listed

using Microsoft Excel and the sort function was used to search for duplication. The key words and phrases were narrowed down to 184, then 98. All 98 key words and phrases were printed, cut out and grouped into broader themes. Interpreting which key words and phrases belonged together was not always straightforward, as a benefit described could relate to a physical, emotional, mental or spiritual experience. If it was not clear or had been expressed in more than one context, the key word or phrase was included under each associated theme. Thirty broad themes were initially identified, then narrowed down, eventually reducing to 13 themes. The process adopted is consistent with Creswell's (2013) suggested approach.

Results

The 13 themes identified were: nature, perception of place, water, physical and psychological benefits of wild swimming, swimming, reflective space, community and environment, the unexpected, constant, contemplative, can do anything, descriptive feeling benefits, and healing. These themes were explored utilising references from the interview transcripts.

Nature

All participants expressed positive benefits of feeling connected to nature through swimming in the Ladies' Pond. Significant related statements were expressed 36 times throughout the interviews. Participant One made reference to nature contact seven times; Participant Two, eight times; Participant Three, eight times; Participant Four, five times; and Participant Five, eight times. This would suggest that being in nature through wild swimming is of benefit to the participants. Indicative statements:

It's really about feeling connected to nature again and that feeling of connection (Participant One).

To look at nature was quite a healing thing, it's quite a powerful thing (Participant Two).

Perception of the place

Perception of the place was referred to by all participants. In total it was mentioned 35 times in the thematic analysis. For example:

But I think fundamentally nature is surely, you get so much energy out of it. You know trees talk to each other and I don't know nature is just and you know (Participant Four).

I think the Ladies' Pond as a place has an aura of healing about it (Participant Five).

We feel more of a sense of empathy and this is what we're here for, is to commune with the water, with nature and so on (Participant Three).

Water

Four out of five participants made reference to the water and cold water immersion as contributing to the healing experience of wild swimming. Participants did not elaborate on what it was about the cold water immersion.

For me it's the cold water immersion (Participant Five).

The water does something (Participant One).

Physical and psychological benefits of nature connection

There were sufficient examples of experiences that would allude to physical and psychological benefits being part of the experiences of wild swimming. For example:

Like I struggle with anxiety a lot and I often have the kind of body anxiety...and you can't even pinpoint what you might be anxious about. And the Ponds it's like, once I get in the gate, I feel calmer (Participant One).

At the time I was very susceptible to depression and when I went to the Ladies' Pond and swam the depression, which I was lugging around with me, which was like a knapsack full of stones, would float away as I entered the water (Participant Five).

Swimming

Although swimming was mentioned as a contributing factor to the experience of the benefits of wild swimming, three participants stated it was the swimming, whereas all five participants reported it was nature. Participant Two said they did not even really like swimming and other participants said that it was a combination of both swimming and nature.

Gosh yes, a bit of both. Because if it was just the swimming I would just go to the pool (Participant Four).

Reflective space

Data collected from participants demonstrated that they experienced the Pond as providing an opportunity for reflective space. It was mentioned by all participants, but not repeatedly. For example:

And it provides me with space in the day, when I can be reflective, when nobody is making demands on me (Participant Five).

Community and environment

All participants were asked about the community aspect of being at the Pond. It appeared to be an important factor for some participants but not all. For example:

I don't really feel part of a community, but I just feel there's a very congenial atmosphere there on non-crowded days (Participant Three).

There's a winter community and a summer community and I think they are very, very different...and I think there's a solidarity with the ones that go through the winter with the regulars who want to go every day (Participant Two).

The unexpected

The unexpected things participants saw in nature as a result of wild swimming also appeared pertinent. This was only mentioned by three participants in this context. For example:

You never know what you're going to see. I mean, ermm, you might see, I've suddenly seen the kingfisher and that makes me feel elated. Or the herons fighting yesterday (Participant Three).

Contemplative

Providing space for contemplation was only important for two participants.

It's contemplative swimming in the pond, its coming back to, it's being attentive to how I feel within myself (Participant Three).

Constant

Experiencing nature as being constant through swimming in the Ladies' Pond was reported by two participants:

It's so big it's always there and you know it it's a constant (Participant Two).

Feeling they can do anything

Some participants expressed swimming in the Pond gave them the experience of feeling they can do anything:

It can make you feel invincible, like I can do this (Participant Two).

Descriptive feeling benefits

From all participants, a total of 34 significant statements that related to descriptive feeling benefits were described. These benefits were mentioned by all participants and through analysis it seems to be an important experience. It should be noted that some descriptive feeling benefits, such as calm, were also attributed to physical and

psychological benefits. The same word was used in different contexts, for example in relation to calming the body. The following are examples of participants' experiences:

I feel very calm in nature (Participant One).

But it's more on a soul level, on a spiritual level, it's a feeling of being when I'm in the pond (Participant Three).

Healing

All participants provided a description of what they understand healing to mean, experiences that suggested the Ladies' Pond is a place of healing, and the reasons they believe this:

I definitely go to the Ladies' Pond, eh, as a place of healing (Participant One).

To look at nature was quite a healing thing it's quite a powerful thing (Participant Two).

So it's essentially healing and I feel better afterwards. Again, on every level... physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually (Participant Three).

From the 13 themes, five key themes emerged from the findings: *nature* through wild swimming, *perception of the place* through wild swimming, *descriptive feeling benefits* of wild swimming, *physical and psychological benefits* of wild swimming and healing through wild swimming. Other themes were an important part of the experience for some participants, but not central to the experience for all.

Discussion

In addition to the five key themes identified in the results section that emerged in relation to the literature reviewed, I explored swimmers' experiences of water, because participants shared that this experience provided an opportunity to actually be 'in' nature rather than just looking at it. However, it was not referred to by all participants. I also explored how participants felt about nature. This was not highlighted in the thematic analysis as it was a question relating to a general context outside of the Pond.

Textural description

As phenomenology accounts for experiences, Creswell (2013) suggests that following data analysis the researcher provides a textural and structural description which describes participants' experiences and elucidates the context to provide a general sense of participants' experiences.

From data analysis and research results, the common experience of swimmers at the Ladies' Pond includes: experiencing nature through seeing the seasons and being close to herons, kingfishers, and ducks through wild swimming; having a sense of feeling connected to nature through their perception of the place, such as the energy, being a place of pilgrimage, or a happy place; experiencing descriptive feeling benefits such as awe, beauty and peace; experiencing a range of physical and psychological relief, such as calming the body, calming the mind, reducing anxiety and depression; feeling safe by being in a non-threatening environment, which being an all-female space contributes to; and being 'in' nature through immersion in water. All Ladies' Pond swimmers express a concern about nature and a connection to nature since childhood. Participants experience the Ladies' Pond to be healing, for example on a soul level, or physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually.

Nature and perception of place

As noted in the literature review, Capaladi et al. (2015), describe nature contact as spending time immersed in nature or seeing images of nature, and nature connectedness as a person's subjective view of nature. As indicated in the results, participants in the current study expressed benefits from wild swimming in the Ladies' Pond that were congruent with nature contact and nature connectedness. For example: seeing wildlife, experiencing the seasons, feeling a sense of connection to nature, and experiencing the place to provide them with a subjective benefit, such as providing energy or being a place of pilgrimage. Similarly, Hegarty (2010) found that participants took part in activities in nature to experience nature connectedness and utilised these to experience positive feelings and self-healing. We can clearly conclude that the swimmers at the Ladies' Pond share this experience. It would be useful to explore whether the swimmers experience this in another setting in nature, or whether it is specific to the Ladies' Pond. Nisbet and Zelenski (2011) suggest that people do not find ways to connect with nature as they do not recognise the benefits. This would contradict the experience of wild swimmers as identified in the results section: being in nature is one of the main benefits of swimming in the Ladies' Pond.

Physical and psychological benefits of nature connection

Participants in the current research identified that being in nature provided physical and psychological benefits. Three participants expressed experiencing benefits on every level: physical, emotional, mental and spiritual. These experiences confirm the research conducted by Keniger et al. (2013) as identified in the literature review. However, whilst all participants experienced physical, psychological and emotional benefits, they did not all express a spiritual experience in this context. Therefore, the spiritual aspect differs to research by Keniger et al. (2013) in relation to spiritual benefits. Participant One made reference to the Ladies' Pond as helping to alleviate her anxiety. This appears to be congruent with Martyn and Brymer (2016) who suggest that nature has an impact on reducing anxiety and Keniger et al. (2013) who report that

anxiety is reduced through being in nature. However, not all participants described this experience. There were a number of references to physical and psychological benefits reported by all participants, but their experiences varied.

Descriptive feeling benefits

All participants described feelings they experienced through wild swimming in the Ladies' Pond. For example: feeling calm, experiencing moments of joy, peace, feeling happy, beauty, feeling connected, feeling invincible, feeling awe, euphoria, and a feeling of being. These are congruent with statements from Hegarty (2010). Similarly, Johnson (2002) describes spiritual benefits of nature such as beauty, peace, self-forgetting and competence. It seems clear that we can suggest that swimmers at the Ladies' Pond experience spiritual benefits. However, this would benefit from further exploration. Some of these words were used in both the descriptive feeling benefits theme and other themes such as physical and psychological benefits. It would help to understand whether they experience these as spiritual benefits, physical and psychological benefits, both, or something different entirely. Research noted in the literature review by Keniger et al. (2013) suggested that spiritual benefits in nature are linked with transcendent experiences. Similarly, research reviewed by Davis (2011) indicated that peak experiences were attributed to feelings of awe and experiencing the beauty of nature in a profound way. The participants I interviewed gave descriptions of experiencing sensations such as awe at the Ladies' Pond. However, when I asked if they had any transcendental or peak experiences at the Ladies' Pond, they were not sure. Although it is clear that spiritual benefits are experienced by all swimmers, and participants expressed experiences such as feeling connected, happy or being caught up in the moment, they did not necessarily relate this directly to a transcendent experience. This would benefit from further research.

Healing

All participants experienced swimming in the Ladies' Pond to be healing and provided examples of experiences relating to the definition of healing posited by Egnew (2005). He describes healing as being on all levels: mental, emotional, physical and spiritual, although the social aspect he describes as contributing to healing was not present for all participants. It is clear from the current research that participants experience the Ladies' Pond to be healing. This is congruent with Hegarty (2010), whose research found that participants experience nature as self-healing. The author linked this mostly with nature connectedness, and participants' experiences of using nature to feel calm, gain clarity, and to take time out through different activities in nature.

Water

Being in the water provides an opportunity to be 'immersed' in nature, and participants expressed physiological benefits from the cold water immersion. This suggests similarities to the benefits posited in the literature review by Tipton et al. (2017), as well as by Huttenen et al. (2004), and Bastos et al. (2012). However, water did not

appear to be a prominent theme, as I had expected. Exploring further into the healing benefits of cold-water immersion is an area for further research.

Non-duality and the ecological self

All participants expressed having a concern for nature. Although their primary reason for swimming might not be to experience an ecological self, or to experience the transpersonal, as they might not even know what this means, my research could indicate that wild swimmers display signs of a non-dual ecological self as posited by Davis (2011) and Palamos (2016). Further research into this is needed.

Limitations of the research

Although I bracketed my experience and took an objective view, as a researcher I come to the research question with positive experiences of swimming in the Ladies' Pond. Both myself as researcher and the participants experience nature as being healing, which may have influenced interpretation of the data. However, the research suggested that participants had similar experiences.

Future research

It would be useful to conduct this research with a control group and introduce people who have never swum in the Ladies' Pond or those who do not necessarily experience nature as beneficial, to see if their experiences are congruent with this sample. As the participant size was quite small, increasing the number of participants might yield a wider range of experiences or confirm existing experiences.

Further research could be conducted to explore whether the swimmers consider their experience as being spiritual, physical or psychological, how participants interpret descriptive feelings, and if they consider these to be spiritual. It would also be useful to understand if they have a religious or spiritual view, and if so, how this relates to spiritual benefits. Another area for future research is whether Ladies' Pond swimmers have a concept of an ecological self and to explore transcendental experiences at the Ladies' Pond.

Conclusion

This research has demonstrated that wild swimmers consider a range of experiences as being of benefit in relation to wild swimming at the Ladies' Pond. Some experiences appear to be collective and others individual. It has suggested that whilst some of the findings appear to be congruent with previous research in the literature review, there are areas where it is not clear what contributes to the experience. These areas for exploration have been highlighted for further research.

Acknowledgements

This article is based on the final dissertation research project undertaken by the author and supervised by Dr. David Lipschitz. It was submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the MSc programme in Professional Development: Consciousness, Spirituality and Transpersonal Psychology. The programme was delivered by Alef Trust in collaboration with the Professional Development Foundation. The degree was quality assured and accredited by Middlesex University, UK.

References

- Boleyn, Bastos, F. N., Vanderlei, L. C. M., Nakamura, F. Y., Bertollo, M., Godoy, M. F., Junior, J. N., Hoshi, R. A., & Pastre, C. M. (2012). Effects of cold water immersion and active recovery on post-exercise heart rate variability. *International Journal of Sports Medicine*, 33(11), 873-879. <https://doi.org/10.1055/s-0032-1301905>
- Capaldi, C. A., Passmore, H. A., Nisbet, E. K., Zelenski, J. M., & Dopko, R. L. (2015). Flourishing in nature: A review of the benefits of connecting with nature and its application as a wellbeing intervention. *International Journal of Wellbeing*, 5(4), 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.5502/ijw.v5i4.449>
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Sage.
- Davies, C., & Corney, R. (2012). *Taking the waters: A swim around Hampstead Heath*. Frances Lincoln Limited.
- Davis, J. V. (2011). Ecopsychology, transpersonal psychology, and nonduality. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, 30(1-2), 137-147. <https://doi.org/10.24972/ijts.2011.30.1-2.137>
- Egnew, T. R. (2005). The meaning of healing: transcending suffering. *The Annals of Family Medicine*, 3(3), 255-262. <https://doi.org/10.1370/afm.313>
- Haddad, H. A., Parouty, J., & Buchheit, M. (2012). Effect of daily cold water immersion on heart rate variability and subjective ratings of well-being in highly trained swimmers. *International Journal of Sports Physiology and Performance*, 7(1), 33-38. <https://doi.org/10.1123/ijsp.7.1.33>
- Hegarty, J. R. (2010). Out of the consulting room and into the woods? Experiences of nature-connectedness and self-healing. *European Journal of Ecopsychology*, 1, 64-84. http://ej.e.wyrdwise.com/v1/EJE%20v1_Hegarty.pdf
- Hinds, J., & Sparks, P. (2011). The affective quality of human-natural environment relationships. *Evolutionary Psychology*, 9(3), 451-469. <https://doi.org/10.1177/147470491100900314>
- Huttunen, P., Kokko, L., & Ylijukuri, V. (2004). Winter swimming improves general well-being. *International Journal of Circumpolar Health*, 63(2), 140-144. <https://doi.org/10.3402/ijch.v63i2.17700>
- Johnson, B. (2002). On the spiritual benefits of wilderness. *International Journal of Wilderness*, 8(3), 28-32.

- Keniger, L. E., Gaston, K. J., Irvine, K. N., & Fuller, R. A. (2013). What are the benefits of interacting with nature? *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 10(3), 913-935. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph10030913>
- Martyn, P., & Brymer, E. (2016). The relationship between nature relatedness and anxiety. *Journal of Health Psychology*, 21(7), 1436-1445. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1359105314555169>
- Nisbet, E. K., & Zelenski, J. M. (2011). Underestimating nearby nature: Affective forecasting errors obscure the happy path to sustainability. *Psychological Science*, 22(9), 1101-1106. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797611418527>
- Nisbet, E. K., Zelenski, J. M., & Murphy, S. A. (2009). The nature relatedness scale: Linking individuals' connection with nature to environmental concern and behavior. *Environment and Behavior*, 41(5), 715-740. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013916508318748>
- Palamos, K. (2016). Nature, human ecopsychological consciousness and the evolution of paradigm change in the face of current ecological crisis. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, 35(2), 88-92. <https://doi.org/10.24972/ijts.2016.35.2.88>
- Rowan, J. (1993). *The transpersonal: Spirituality in psychotherapy and counselling*. Routledge.
- Tipton, M. J., Collier, N., Massey, H., Corbett, J., & Harper, M. (2017). Cold water immersion: kill or cure? *Experimental Physiology*, 102(11), 1335-1355. <https://doi.org/10.1113/EP086283>
- Zelenski, J. M., & Nisbet, E. K. (2014). Happiness and feeling connected: The distinct role of nature relatedness. *Environment and Behavior*, 46(1), 3-23. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013916512451901>

About the Author

Lucy Sam holds a MSc in Consciousness, Spirituality and Transpersonal Psychology. She is an experienced event and project manager, qualified transformative coach, energy healer and yoga teacher. She is interested in and utilises spiritual practices and healing modalities in her work. Lucy believes in the power of nature to heal and is dedicated to creating spaces for healing, growth and transformation.

Copyright © 2020 Sam. This is an open-access article licensed and distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/). The use, distribution or reproduction in other forums is permitted, provided the original author(s) or licensor are credited and that the original publication in this journal is cited, in accordance with accepted academic practice. No use, distribution or reproduction is permitted which does not comply with these terms.