

Being in Nature: A Heuristic Inquiry

Gabriela Bütschi

Alef Trust and Middlesex University

This paper presents core findings of the explorative research study on individuals' living experiences in nature using Moustakas' (1990) qualitative method of heuristic inquiry. One-on-one interviews were conducted with six co-researchers between the ages of 29–59, lasting between 75–105 minutes, from which several shared themes emerged. Co-researchers revealed how personal difficulties in their lives gave rise to a desire to go into nature to find healing. Nature was deemed to be non-judgemental and provide space for feelings to surface, be acknowledged and integrated, creating the possibility for healing and spiritual growth. Nature was perceived as healer and teacher, providing the opportunity to discover a sense of oneness and connection with nature and the self. This also promoted some degree of altruism and an increase in the intrinsic aspirations of the co-researchers. There was a consensus that language cannot adequately express nature and transformational experiences. Understanding the dichotomy of human and nature as separate appears to be a key step in the journey, resulting in the realisation of our commonality and connection. Results indicate that human-nature connection is essential and intrinsic in human beings and the research findings illustrate the potential psychological, physiological, physical, and spiritual benefits.

Keywords: nature, transformation, transpersonal psychology, connection, language, dichotomy

Since childhood, *being in nature* has had long-lasting effects on my life, some of which have been transformational. Its significance influenced some decisions, such as volunteering with refugee women in a garden project based in Switzerland. These are women who have lived through a great deal of trauma and loss, something I can relate to.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Gabriela Bütschi. Email: gabriela.buetschi@pm.me

Recommended citation: Bütschi, G. (2022). Being in nature: A heuristic inquiry. *Consciousness, Spirituality & Transpersonal Psychology*, 3, 97-110. <https://doi.org/10.53074/cstp.2022.31>

I have been gardening with them for five years now, and our approach is in tune with nature, demonstrating the interconnectedness of all things. During that time, I became aware how nature has served as a teacher, healer, family, and sage in their lives, as well as mine. This inspired me to explore the impact of nature as a potential catalyst of transformation towards healing.

While life's challenges, such as loss, anxiety, trauma, depression, are unique to each of us, they are also universal experiences (Neimeyer et al., 2014). Many of these processes, which occur in our inner world or psyche, can be found in nature, our outer world, which is an extension of our living bodies (Davis & Canty, 2013). When we are in nature, we are exposed to the truths of the universe. They show us the impermanence of constant change, death, re-birth, beauty, and destruction. Nature teaches us all those things for free when we pay attention. It doesn't distinguish between race, culture, gender, or belief. Therefore, maintaining an alliance with nature can mean the difference between health and illness (Brach, 2013).

A further reason for my research topic is that our connection to nature seems more tenuous than ever (Brach, 2013). Kesebir and Kesebir (2017) documented an increasing shift away from being in nature since the early 1950s. They observed a consistent temporal pattern, which coincided with the explanatory role of increased virtual and indoor recreational options (e.g., television, video games, mobile phones). Hence, experiences of nature are transformed along with a changing society (Clayton et al., 2017). This suggests that while our presence on the Earth is transforming the planet, we need to consider that nature has the capability of transforming us, too.

As long as humans have existed, we have lived in, with, and as part of nature. But what does the term nature mean? Is it an urban garden or the uninhabited wilderness? Its definition has varied across time, place, the individual or culture (Selin, 2010). The idea of nature has also been at the centre of science with its debate of nature versus nurture. Hence, nature is deeply linked to human society. Ducarme and Couvet (2020) examined the origins, etymology, and historical semantics of the word nature and its different meanings in contemporary Western dictionaries. They found that nature had several conflicting meanings due to vast differences across cultures and eras. This is supported by Williams (1983), who wrote that the concept of nature is "perhaps the most complex word in the language" (p. 221). Therefore, I decided to use Schroevers' (1982) definition of nature for this study. He suggests that nature is "everything that organises and maintains itself, possibly in connection with human actions, but not according to human purposes" (p.74).

Theories concerning nature's impact on health range from Hippocrates' healing gardens for patients in Ancient Greece to existing research which has demonstrated a positive link between nature and health (Hartig et al. 2014; White et al., 2019). Hence, the connection between nature and health and well-being has been researched in many fields, including

health, psychology, environmental studies, and urban design to mention a few (White et al., 2019). Recently there has been an increased interest in bringing nature back into a therapeutic setting (Jordan, 2013), and medical practices (Hansen et al., 2017; Park et al., 2010). Frumkin et al. (2017) provided an extensively reviewed summary of evidence-based health benefits such as reduction in stress, depression, aggression, and anxiety; as well as improved immune function and general health.

Most research concerning nature has focused on the beneficial physiological and psychological effects (Song et al., 2016), such as recovery and restoration of mental fatigue. Kaplan and Kaplan (1989; Kaplan, 1995) proposed the attention restoration theory (ART). They found that spending time in or looking at nature can relieve mental fatigue and increase concentration. The brain's ability to focus on a specific input or task is limited, resulting in *directed attention fatigue*. According to ART, being exposed to natural environments promotes more effortless brain function.

The biophilia hypothesis by Kellert and Wilson (1995) suggests that humans have an innate desire to connect with nature and other forms of life. Already Erich Fromm (1973) described the term *biophilia* in the book *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* as “the passionate love of life and of all that is alive; it is the wish to further growth, whether in a person, a plant, an idea, or a social group” (p. 365). Mayer et al. (2009) found that research on contact with nature clearly illustrates benefits at the level of the mind and body, while Keniger et al. (2013) found limited research into spiritual and transformational benefits in comparison. They proposed that feelings of connectedness to a larger reality and increased inspiration played an important role for spiritual well-being.

Dufrechou (2004) found that a deep connection with nature can give rise to psychospiritual transformation, which is able to heal the division between mind and body. Some of the experiences reported included qualities of love, peace, support, inspiration, joy, and communication with nature.

Naor and Mayseless (2019) found in their study that participants described nature as a concrete and experiential setting, where they reflected and embodied a lifelong significant and challenging personal issue. Secondly, most participants felt dissonance and inner conflict when facing the avoided and challenging issue encountered in nature. The third theme illustrated peak experiences emerging through the required confrontation with these concrete situations, resulting in moments of meaningful insight. Lastly, theme four revealed that participants were choosing to own and embed these aspects into their identity and life (Naor & Mayseless, 2019). Davis (2012) illustrated that peak experiences and awe are frequently triggered through direct contact with nature, and that such awe-inspiring moments may decrease post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms, as argued by Anderson et al (2018). Such moments also create greater humility (Stellar et al., 2018), which is an emotion often mentioned in connection with wilderness experiences (Clayton et al., 2017).

Nature is one of the top-ranking places where individuals experience awe which attunes humans to something larger than themselves (Piff et al., 2015). Albrecht (2018) describes this as: “A positive feeling of oneness with the earth and its life forces, where the boundaries between self and the rest of nature are obliterated and a deep sense of peace and connectedness pervades consciousness”. This feeling of non-duality dissolves the sense of a separate self and nature, as other, into a higher state of awareness/consciousness and the flow of experiences. In this state, self and nature co-exist simultaneously and are indistinguishable from each other. In nature, far from daily stimulation and responsibilities, an experience enabling of space and time for introspection, deep contemplation, solitude, healing, and growth can occur. This in turn, can evoke an awareness of the interconnectedness.

Larrère and Larrère (2015) assert that many linguists, historians, and philosophers have pointed out that the meaning of nature is far from being unified or self-evident. The concept of being separated from nature is thus deeply embedded in a culturally defined nature-culture dichotomy and supported by language (Fletcher, 2017). Humans are inherently part of nature, there can be no such separation. Hence, to return to nature or to go into nature is an impossibility, an oxymoron, and the origin of the schism that in many ways causes a sense of alienation in modern humans (Fletcher, 2017). Fletcher (2017) argues that supporting the concept of nature opposing humanity conversely strengthens the sense of opposition. This dominant Cartesian view contributes to an exploitation of nature as a means to satisfy our own needs (Palamos, 2016). On the other hand, Argyrou (2005) points out that even a stance of inclusion creates a belief of separation, as it requires to see oneself as separate from the unity.

Method

Heuristic inquiry, a qualitative and holistic research process pioneered by Moustakas (1990), lent itself to this study. It allowed me to become more immersed in the phenomenon and to explore intimate experiences that were meaningful to the co-researchers (Barbour, 2001).

Procedure

My *initial engagement* came from my life-long passion for nature. Those profound experiences of connection with nature led me through the processes of self-dialogue, tacit knowing and intuition (Moustakas, 1990). From this, arose the research question: “What are individuals’ living experiences in nature?” *Immersion* in the topic grew from attending to my allotment garden twice a week for half a day, as well as daily walks in the woods, researching literature, interacting with others, self-dialogue, and journaling. Moustakas (1990) describes this as the research question becoming “a lingering presence” (p. 11) as the researcher lives and grows in knowledge and understanding of it. The *incubation* phase involved surrendering to a creative process in the unconscious

(Moustakas, 1990). Thus, it represents a subtle digestion of the previous initial engagement, to allow for a more embodied, intuitive, and tacit understanding of the area of inquiry to emerge. During *illumination*, which describes a breakthrough process, themes surfaced as a result of the engagement of the previous stages. The essence of the breakthrough is synthetic and creative, unifying fragmented understandings or reforming previous ones (Sultan, 2018). Subsequently, *explication* involves a further surfacing and clarifying of the illumination into an understandable system of topic themes, with a detailed description of the core ideas resulting in a composite depiction which presents a holistic explication of the collective wisdom of each individual depiction. Finally, a *creative synthesis* combining all the various strands of knowledge is compiled using tacit knowing and intuition. This resulted in the creation of a short film.

Co-researchers

Moustakas (1990) emphasised the importance of co-researchers' need to be interested, committed, willing, enthusiastic and able to describe their experiences of the phenomenon, openly and honestly. Therefore, co-researchers were chosen through homogenous purposive sampling (Grbich, 1999; Palys, 2008). The sample included adults I have known and/or who expressed a personal interest in the study (Table 1). Each potential co-researcher received an invitation letter informing them about the nature of the study, probing their interest (Sultan, 2018). Inclusion criteria included a love for nature, possible transformational experience, and a willingness to eloquently share nature experiences in English or German.

Table 1
Co-researchers' Profile

Name	Gender	Age	Country of residence	Occupation
Shawn	Male	47	Canada	IT Manager
Shannon	Female	35	United Kingdom	Student
Nick	Male	59	United States of America	Higher Education Administrator
Mila	Female	48	Germany	Therapist
Sea	Male	29	Armenia	Business Development Executive
Anni	Female	56	Germany	Speech Therapist

Data collection and analysis

One-on-one, semi-structured interviews were conducted (Moustakas, 1990), allowing co-researchers to share their story in a natural way, creating a free flow of data. Each interview lasted between 75–105 minutes and was digitally recorded. Due to the coronavirus pandemic, I conducted all interviews online, and not as intended in nature. All interviews,

expect for one, began by inviting the co-researchers to participate in a short, embodied meditation, during which I offered the word nature. Most of the interview was conducted in an organic way, where questions naturally arose. However, each interview included the following three core questions:

- Describe what it means to you to be in nature?
- Describe how you connect with nature?
- Can you provide examples of how being in nature has been transformational; physically, psychologically, and spiritually?

Once I gathered the data for each co-researcher, I transcribed the content of the interview verbatim. Following which I engaged in the process of thematic analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2017), repeating the same process until all co-researchers' individual depictions were created. Next, I revisited all individual depictions and created a composite depiction, which formed a representation of the integrated experience of all.

Results

Composite depiction

The eight major themes that arose from the individual depictions are: connection, oneness, healer, teacher, transformation, awe, language limitation, and definition. The remaining themes are contained within them.

Connection

Connection with and to nature is at the centre of being in nature. In that sense, all co-researchers felt some form of connection while being in nature. Such experiences included the connection to self, others, and something larger than oneself. Nick shared his interconnectedness with a tree: "You're feeling its movement of the water coming up through it, just like the blood comes through our veins..." All co-researchers mentioned connections to certain aspects of nature, such as animals, plants, and bodies of water. Others experienced nature as a place that facilitated a deeper connection with the divine: "It's more than just a one-way, it's a deeper connection I find than just praying in the house or anything like that", as Shawn put it, or a place that offers "the way to be connected to God" (Sea).

Oneness

Although a feeling of *oneness* was shared by all co-researchers, it was a struggle to define the experience of oneness. They described oneness as "a place of connection, or beauty, of love, of just, of, of wonderment" (Mila), and "I felt one with nature, I felt peace, I felt presence in the world that I haven't experienced, I felt love" (Shannon). One co-researcher felt oneness while swimming in the Mediterranean Sea: "I realise that I'm part of nature, and that this 'everything' is a one-world organism, a huge body, which means I am nature" (Sea). All co-researchers experienced oneness through a sense of expansion,

though Mila also experienced it as contraction “to the point [of the] innermost of the inside of the cell, and there was nothing”. Such experiences were often powerful and “so many times they’ve lasted days, weeks or months, and then ... the contracted self comes back in again” (Mila). This is an experience shared with other co-researchers.

Healer

All co-researchers found that being in nature facilitated healing, on one or all of the following levels: psychological, physical, and spiritual. Co-researchers experienced a feeling of acceptance: “It’s actually like weeping your eyes out, you know that it [nature] can hold you...it can help heal”. Many co-researchers expressed that nature offers something modern medicine lacks. Shawn explained: “There’s nothing a doctor can do to help you”. Furthermore, it helped one co-researcher “to survive, to recover... and that’s why I’m connecting nature directly with health”. There was a consensus of nature being non-judgmental, giving permission to be oneself while holding the space to heal.

Teacher

Nature held the role of a teacher in every co-researcher’s life. Some consciously became aware of the teaching through their suffering, others had an innate connection which made them aware of the lessons being taught. Some co-researchers found that nature taught them about the cycles of life, while others realised through direct observation that nature also teaches about flexibility and adaptability while facing some of life’s challenges. Shawn learnt while observing animals that “you’re not that big and powerful... and that you’re gonna be provided for”, illustrating some trust in the natural process. For Mila, nature is the “biggest teacher”. Co-researcher Sea suggests that “the whole education system should be based on nature”.

Transformation

All co-researchers’ feelings of transformation often involved a shift in awareness, by connecting with nature. Shawn shared that “we’re just one small piece of the whole planet.” This awareness made him realise that everything is interconnected. Mila described transformation on an energetic level: “Whichever energy I go into a wood, to nature with, I always come out with a different and a cleaner energy, and a purer, clearer and calmer energy”. Shannon shares that nature “shifted my whole being, it brought me so much peace, it brought me...joy again, and happiness”. Sea shared his life-changing experience with the sea while living in Malta, facing extreme difficulties, resulting in “a personal transformation”. This big body of water became a “best friend that helped me survive in this difficult period... even helped me to become closer to myself, and nature means to feel that oneness... and feel unity” (Sea).

Awe

Awe, an intense emotional reaction one may have when encountering an extraordinary object, person, or situation, was a shared sentiment. It often referred to the scale and vastness in nature. Shawn described hiking and finally reaching the top of the mountains

and was “in awe of how... you’re still not very big. I mean it just puts you into that perspective”. As Nick shared: “The stars, the awe that everyone has felt, you’re humbled. You also realise you’re connected...to something larger”. Mila experienced awe in her flower garden as “a firework display throughout the whole year”. The amazement at the sheer number of colours, shades and intensity feels like “wow, a place of connection, or beauty, of love, of just, of, of wonderment, of like oneness” (Mila).

Language

All co-researchers struggled with definitions of nature, often using metaphors for nature as “a holy realm, such as church, temple, infinity, and God”. Nick said of his definition of nature that “it’s normally not articulated. In some ways it’s OK in that sacred shouldn’t be spoken”. He continued: “In the elements, there is the holy space, one of the manifestations of what we would call creative force or God”. Mila utilised a religious analogy, describing how being in nature, among the trees, “feels like being in a temple of sorts, and they [the trees] all feel like the monks who are just there, and giving me advice, or answers, in a way that I can really understand”. She expressed her frustration with language’s limitations, calling her attempts to describe nature as “pale and insignificant...the words I’m using next don’t do it any justice. It was so much more than that” (Mila).

Definition

Shawn felt that “nature is about getting away from people... back to the land... that hasn’t been disturbed as much.” Nick describes nature as “anything tied with the elementals” which included “the weather, the rocks, the trees, the plants, everything in that field... what we would call the animal kingdom, plant kingdom and old kingdom...atmosphere”. Sea’s definition of nature comprised a cosmological element in that nature was “the physical body of our solar system and universe...interdependent of all living systems”. Anni defined nature as “the foundation of what I am, of what life is. Nature is life”, while nature was described as “the freedom, love and connection” by Mila.

Creative synthesis

The realisation that nature is multisensory, inspired me to create a short film, capturing both the essence of this study, and the co-researchers’ experiences (Bütschi, 2022). The short film shows nature scenes portrayed through the individual experiences of the co-researchers. In order to emphasise the personal experiences, the corresponding quotations were accentuated with the voices of different speakers.

Discussion

The central premise of this study was to explore the diversity and depth of individuals’ subjective experiences in nature. A heuristic inquiry lent itself to achieve a deeper understanding of this phenomenon. The findings suggest that being in nature has the

potential for transformation towards healing, physically, psychologically, and spiritually. However, language and its limitations revealed an interesting challenge in the process.

According to Thalle (2014), we are intrinsically linked to nature by the air we breathe, the water we use, the sun or rain on our skin, which all life on Earth depends upon, after all we are made of stardust. This was a statement all co-researchers related to, as they shared the notion that a connection with nature is a deep entwinement. They shared how nature facilitated a connection to themselves, others, and something larger than themselves. This is consistent with Davis (2012), who states that “nature is a mirror into ourselves, and more fundamentally, we are nature” (p. 7). Connection with nature can create intimacy and a sense of joined destiny leading to ego-transcendence, though Allured (2011) contends that intimacy can be provided unless our human attachment needs are met first. I do not believe that this is a prerequisite as most people developed with unperfect human attachment. Such deep connections often occurred while co-researchers were in nature by themselves, allowing room for self-reflection which encouraged a closer connection to nature. During these moments, none of the co-researchers felt loneliness. Instead, they shared a sense of connection to something larger than themselves, which some of them labelled oneness. In all cases, these experiences occurred while being alone. This may be the most profound and sublime state achievable, bringing a deeper meaning to the term connection.

The findings further affirm the consensus in both qualitative and quantitative research that being in nature plays an important role in our physical, psychological, or spiritual wellbeing (Frumkin et al., 2017). These benefits have been identified by Keniger et al. (2013) who found that nature has the capacity to evoke feelings and bring them to the surface, so they could be felt and acknowledged and, in some cases, integrated. However, they are not conclusive of which mechanisms (e.g., biodiversity, accessibility) are responsible. I argue that an individual needs to be open and willing for such a process to take place. In other cases, nature had the capacity to distract co-researchers from challenging feelings, qualities which were identified as therapeutic (McDonald et al., 2009). Often the healing took place by observing nature and learning from it. Hence, nature provides a container akin to a safe therapeutic space in psychotherapy (Jordan, 2013).

Awe involves powerful feelings of amazement and wonder, as well as a mix of fear and respect for nature (Bethelmy & Corraliza, 2019). In moments of awe, co-researchers were touched deeply on a soul level. This triggered physiological effects such as goosebumps in two co-researchers, the sensation of chills and a change in heart rate, which supports the findings by Keltner and Haidt (2003). Anderson et al. (2018) demonstrated that awe in nature can heal stress-related symptoms. While all co-researchers found tranquillity, none of them mentioned it as a direct link to awe.

All co-researchers described their transformation as spiritual in that they felt a connection to something larger than themselves, and some experienced a sense of oneness. In most cases the feeling of awe in nature was a core ingredient of co-researchers' transformational

experience in which the sense of self expanded beyond the ordinary boundaries (Davis, 2012; Hartelius et al., 2007). A common theme amongst transformational experiences were feelings of gratitude and humility. Half of the co-researchers found it challenging to express their transpersonal experiences due to stigmatisation and limitations of language.

When it came to defining what nature is, all co-researchers used similar concepts, such as aspects of nature (e.g., plants, animals), some included the universe, and others the elements of the spiritual world. While Ducarme and Couvet (2020) proposed that the concept of nature is intrinsically linked to the culture and time an individual is immersed in, this study supports this notion. This may warrant further research. In defining what nature is, all co-researchers struggled with the inadequacy of language. Several of the co-researchers commented on how words could not describe some feelings that being part of nature could bring about.

All co-researchers shared an inability to verbalise their experiences in nature, using instead concepts such as ‘church’, ‘temples’ or expressed themselves through body language and sounds such as ‘aaah’ or ‘wow’. Thus, at the onset, my exploration of peoples’ living experiences in nature led to a significant challenge, raising many questions related to language. It is entirely possible that the very concept of being in nature is inconceivable to someone who was raised in the Amazon, the Himalayas, the Serengeti, or elsewhere. Fletcher (2017) argues that stating the need to connect with nature is oxymoronic and reinforces the sense of separation. He suggests that a separateness from nature is “reinforced by the very environmental education and related practices employed to overcome it” (p. 227). I agree with Fletcher that language exacerbates the separateness, in that it is quite possible to conceptualise a separation from nature, or oneness with it, without having experienced either. The Western concept of disconnect from nature is “grounded in a culturally specific nature-culture dichotomy” (Fletcher, 2017, p. 228). I suggest that this manifested in the framing of my questions during the interviews, as well as the co-researchers’ attempts to express their experiences. As Fletcher (2017) observed, a new vocabulary is required “that challenges the nature-culture dualism” (p. 230). I therefore suggest that further study of the use of language would be of great merit. Additionally, it may be worthwhile to study the extent to which the languages of other cultures are dichotomous, and the diversity of human concepts of nature.

Implications and limitations

The sample size of this heuristic inquiry was small, and all co-researchers shared a culturally similar background, posing a limitation. I suggest that the commonality in experience of healing and learning in nature captures an individual’s deep and subjective experiences which can be considered an enrichment to existing research in the field. Future research may benefit from enlarging and diversifying co-researcher demographics. Research into the experience of being in nature for individuals who do not have a passion for nature may be useful to see whether findings change. Such research may yield further knowledge and therapeutic methodologies. I intended to conduct the interviews face-to-face where possible and in nature. It remains unknown to what extent co-researcher participation may have yielded deeper insights if interviews had been conducted in nature. There were times during

the process when it was hard to not overstep co-researchers' boundaries and contaminate their experiences with my own.

Conclusion

This study suggests that there are numerous positive psychological, physiological, and spiritual benefits to be gained from being in nature, supporting previous research. Findings suggest that nature has the potential for profound transformative experiences, leading to self-awareness, meaningful transformation, and genuine transpersonal development. However, it is not enough just to be in nature. In all cases solitude and awe appeared to facilitate this deeper connection with nature, self, others, and something beyond. However, the study revealed that the dichotomy of human-nature division is a fundamental problem. The limitations of language were particularly apparent when co-researchers verbalised their transpersonal experiences. The interconnectedness of all these themes, as with nature itself, was also clearly demonstrated in this study.

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 fulfilment 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

- Albrecht, G. A. (2018). *Psychoterratica*. Eutierria. <https://glennaalbrecht.wordpress.com/2018/02/20/eutierria/>
- Allured, E. (2011). Lonely for the other mother: nature and the relational fourth. In B. Willock, L. C. Bohm, & R. C. Curtis (Eds.), *Loneliness and longing: Conscious and unconscious aspects*. (pp. 253–265). Routledge.
- Anderson, C. L., Monroy, M., & Keltner, D. (2018). Awe in nature heals: Evidence from military veterans, at-risk youth, and college students. *Emotion, 18*(8), 1195–1202. <https://doi.org/10.1037/emo0000442>
- Argyrou, V. (2005). *The logic of environmentalism: Anthropology, ecology, and postcoloniality*. Berghahn Books.
- Barbour, R. S. (2001). The role of qualitative research in broadening the 'evidence base' for clinical practice. *Journal of Evaluation in Clinical Practice, 6*(2), 155-163. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1046/j.1365-2753.2000.00213.x>

- Bethelmy, L. C., & Corraliza, J. A. (2019). Transcendence and sublime experience in nature: Awe and inspiring energy. *Frontiers in Psychology, 10*, 509. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00509>
- Brach, T. (2013). *Loving life, loving earth* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FwT4p3Ha3Rw>
- Bütschi, G. (2022). *Being in nature: A heuristic inquiry* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eBan5ZtCwY4>
- Clayton, S., Colléony, A., Conversy, P., Maclouf, E., Martin, L., Torres, A. C., Truong, M. X., & Prévot, A. C. (2017). Transformation of experience: Toward a new relationship with nature. *Conservation Letters, 10*(5), 645–651. <https://doi.org/10.1111/conl.12337>
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2017). *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Davis, J. (2012). *Psychological benefits of nature: Research findings for wilderness therapists* [Symposium presentation]. Wilderness Therapy Symposium, Boulder, Co. http://www.johnvdavis.com/files/Psy-Nature_SOLB_2014.pdf
- Davis, J. V., & Canty, J. M. (2013). Ecopsychology and transpersonal psychology. In H. L. Friedman & G. Hartelius (Eds.) *The Wiley-Blackwell handbook of transpersonal psychology* (pp. 595–611). Willey-Blackwell.
- Ducarme, F., & Couvet, D. (2020). What does ‘nature’ mean? *Palgrave Communications, 6*, 14. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-020-0390-y>
- Dufrechou, J. P. (2004). We are one: Grief, weeping, and other deep emotions in response to nature as a path toward wholeness. *Humanistic Psychologist, 32*(4), 357–378. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08873267.2004.9961760>
- Fletcher, R. (2017). Connection with nature is an oxymoron: A political ecology of “nature-deficit disorder.” *Journal of Environmental Education, 48*(4), 226–233. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00958964.2016.1139534>
- Fromm, E. (1973). *The anatomy of human destructiveness*. Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Frumkin, H., Bratman, G. N., Breslow, S. J., Cochran, B., Kahn, P. H., Lawler, J. J., Levin, P. S., Tandon, P. S., Varanasi, U., Wolf, K. L., & Wood, S. A. (2017). Nature contact and human health: A research agenda. *Environmental Health Perspectives, 125*(7), 075001. <https://doi.org/10.1289/EHP1663>
- Grbich, C. (1999). *Qualitative research in health: An introduction*. SAGE Publications.
- Hansen, M. M., Jones, R., & Tocchini, K. (2017). Shinrin-yoku (Forest bathing) and nature therapy: A state-of-the-art review. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 14*(8), 851. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph14080851>
- Hartelius, G., Caplan, M., & Rardin, M. A. (2007). Transpersonal psychology: Defining the past, divining the future. *Humanistic Psychologist, 35*(2), 135–160. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08873260701274017>
- Hartig, T., Mitchell, R., de Vries, S., & Frumkin, H. (2014). Nature and health. *Annual Review of Public Health, 35*(1), 207–228. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-publhealth-032013-182443>

- Jordan, M. (2013). *Taking therapy outside: A narrative inquiry into counselling and psychotherapy in outdoor natural spaces* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of Brighton.
- Kaplan, R., & Kaplan, S. (1989). *The experience of nature: A psychological perspective*. Cambridge University Press.
- Kaplan, S. (1995). The restorative benefits of nature: Toward an integrative framework. *Journal of Environmental Psychology, 15*(3), 169–182. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0272-4944\(95\)90001-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/0272-4944(95)90001-2)
- Kellert, S. R., & Wilson, E. O. (1995). *The biophilia hypothesis*. Island Press.
- Keltner, D., & Haidt, J. (2003). Approaching awe, a moral, spiritual, and aesthetic emotion. *Cognition and Emotion, 17*(2), 297–314. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02699930302297>
- Keniger, L., Gaston, K., Irvine, K., & Fuller, R. (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>
- Kesebir, S., & Kesebir, P. (2017). A growing disconnection from nature is evident in cultural products. *Perspectives on Psychological Science, 12*(2), 258–269. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17456916166662473>
- Larrère, R., & Larrère, C. (2015). *Penser et agir avec la nature. Une enquête philosophique*. La Découverte.
- Mayer, F. S., Frantz, C. M., Bruehlman-Senecal, E., & Dolliver, K. (2009). Why is nature beneficial? *Environment and Behavior, 41*(5), 607–643. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013916508319745>
- McDonald, M. G., Wearing, S., & Ponting, J. (2009). The nature of peak experience in wilderness. *Humanistic Psychologist, 37*(4), 370–385. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08873260701828912>
- Moustakas, C. (1990). *Heuristic research: Design, methodology, and applications*. SAGE Publications.
- Naor, L., & Maysel, O. (2020). The therapeutic value of experiencing spirituality in nature. *Spirituality in Clinical Practice, 7*(2), 114–133. <https://doi.org/10.1037/scp0000204>
- Neimeyer, R. A., Klass, D., & Dennis, M. R. (2014). A social constructionist account of grief: Loss and the narration of meaning. *Death Studies, 38*(8), 485–498. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07481187.2014.913454>
- 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), 87–92. <https://doi.org/10.24972/ijts.2016.35.2.88>
- Palys, T. (2008). Purposive sampling. In L.M. Given (Ed.), *The Sage encyclopedia of qualitative research methods* (Vol. 2, pp. 697–698). Sage.
- Park, B. J., Tsunetsugu, Y., Kasetani, T., Kagawa, T., & Miyazaki, Y. (2010). The physiological effects of Shinrin-yoku (taking in the forest atmosphere or forest bathing): Evidence from field experiments in 24 forests across Japan. *Environmental Health and Preventive Medicine, 15*(1), 18–26. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12199-009-0086-9>

- Piff, P. K., Dietze, P., Feinberg, M., Stancato, D. M., & Keltner, D. (2015). Awe, the small self, and prosocial behavior. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 108*(6), 883–899. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pspi0000018>
- Schroevers, P. J. (1982). Theme 1: theoretical concepts: diversity in nature as an expression of social and economic circumstances. In S. P. Tjallingii & A. A. de Veer (Eds.), *Perspectives in landscape ecology: contributions to research, planning and management of our environment: proceedings of the international congress organized by the Netherlands society for landscape ecology, Veldhoven, the Netherlands, April 6–11, 1981* (pp. 74–75). Pudoc.
- Selin, H. (2010). *Nature across cultures: Views of nature and the environment in non-Western cultures*. Springer.
- Song, C., Ikei, H., & Miyazaki, Y. (2016). Physiological effects of nature therapy: A review of the research in Japan. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 13*(8), 781. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph13080781>
- Stellar, J. E., Gordon, A., Anderson, C. L., Piff, P. K., McNeil, G. D., & Keltner, D. (2018). Awe and humility. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 114*(2), 258–269. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pspi0000109>
- Sultan, N. (2018). *Heuristic inquiry: Researching human experience holistically*. SAGE Publications.
- Thalle, M. (2014). *We are dead stars* [Video]. YouTube. <https://youtu.be/UUo-Q8hhvBo>
- White, M. P., Alcock, I., Grellier, J., Wheeler, B. W., Hartig, T., Warber, S. L., Bone, A., Depledge, M. H., & Fleming, L. E. (2019). Spending at least 120 minutes a week in nature is associated with good health and wellbeing. *Scientific Reports, 9*, 7730. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-019-44097-3>
- Williams, R. (1983). *Keywords: A vocabulary of culture and society*. Fontana.

About the Author

Gabriela Bütschi graduated and spent 20 years working as a graphic and multimedia designer for Swiss advertising and international publishing companies. She holds a BSc. (Hons) in Psychology, and MSc. in Transpersonal Psychology. In addition, she also holds certificates in transpersonal coaching, and permaculture design. Currently, she is setting up her practice www.yourinnergarden.org, supporting people on their transformative journey. Her many passions involve Sheng Zhen meditation, volunteering with refugee families and capturing nature's expressions with her photo camera.



Copyright © 2022 Bütschi. 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.