

## **‘Me, The Sea, Feeling Good’: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis Exploring the Experience of Looking Out to Sea**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Against the backdrop of increasing urbanization and subsequent disconnection from nature, there has been growing interest in the role that spending time in natural environments can play in promoting well-being. However, most research to date has focused on the health potential of green spaces and neglected the relationship between blue spaces (bodies of inland and coastal water) and well-being outcomes. Studies have shown that spending more time by the sea, or living in close proximity to the coast, is linked with better mental and general health, but have typically neglected to consider how individuals may uniquely experience different types of urban nature. Hence, this study aimed to explore, in-depth, the lived experience of looking out to sea and how it may play a role in well-being. Four self-selected females, living and working in a coastal city, were interviewed using semi-structured techniques. Interviews were recorded and transcribed; and data was analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Results revealed each had a strong and enduring bond with the sea as ‘part of self’, and as transcending the self. Looking out to sea was a multisensory, embodied experience that captivated them in the present, and was perceived to play an important role in the restoration and enhancement of their hedonic and eudemonic well-being. As researchers and policy makers begin to understand potential links between loss of contact with nature and deteriorating public health, better understanding the relationship between the sea and well-being could have significant global value.*

**KEYWORDS:** Blue space, sea, well-being, embodiment, nature connection

Increasing global urbanization is argued to be creating a physical and psychological disconnection from our early evolutionary environments (Beery et al., 2023; Gullone, 2000). The resultant loss of contact with nature is claimed to have a detrimental impact on our mental and physical health (Shanahan et al., 2015; Soga & Gaston, 2016, 2023). In contrast, visiting outdoor ‘blue spaces,’ defined as bodies of inland or coastal water (Völker & Kistemann, 2011), and living in close proximity to the coast, have been positively linked with psychological and general health outcomes (Britton et al., 2020; Gascon et al., 2017; N. Smith et al., 2021; White et al., 2020; 2021). Looking at the sea has been associated with enhanced positive affect, mental restoration and higher self-reported well-being (Dempsey et al., 2018; Garrett et al., 2019b; White et al., 2010). However, compared to the plethora of green space studies, the link between blue space and health remains under-researched (White et al., 2020).

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Existing literature has neglected to consider how individuals may uniquely conceptualize, value, and experience different types of urban nature (Cleary et al., 2017; Wang & Sani, 2024); and is yet to clarify the pathways and mechanisms that link blue space and well-being (Elliot et al., 2023; Gascon et al., 2017). Hence, an opportunity exists for a more qualitative exploration of the experiential and emotional responses to specific blue spaces and their well-being potential (Gascon et al., 2017). As evidence suggests that increasing urbanization and nature-disconnection may have a disproportionate impact on the well-being of women (Dekker et al., 2008; Jennings & Gaither, 2015), this study aims to explore the phenomenological experience of looking out to sea for women living in the coastal city of Brighton and Hove in England, and how this may play a role in their well-being.

### Conceptions of Well-Being

There is a lack of consensus regarding how to define well-being (Trigwell et al., 2015). The terms ‘health’ and ‘well-being’ are argued to overlap (Lomas, 2015) and are used interchangeably in this study, with a preference for well-being. Two perspectives on well-being predominate: subjective well-being (SWB; Diener, 1984) and psychological well-being (PWB; Ryff, 1989). Diener proposes a hedonic conception of well-being that combines cognitive (life satisfaction) and affective (high positive affect, low negative affect) constructs. Ryff offers a broader framework that encompasses six eudemonic dimensions: self-acceptance, positive relations, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth. The Self Determination Theory (SDT; Ryan & Deci, 2000) of human motivation incorporates similar constructs to PWB, but proposes that well-being is *fostered*, rather than defined, through the satisfaction of our psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Seligman (2011) further developed the idea of a multi-faceted approach to human flourishing, incorporating dimensions he proposed individuals pursue for their own sake: positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment (PERMA).

Personal well-being, however, is argued to seldom be the same across individuals and can change over time (Reid & Hunter, 2011). Place-based well-being experiences have been viewed as “a relational outcome, as something that emerges through a complex set of transactions between a person and their broader socio-environmental setting” (Conradson, 2005, p. 338). Hence, qualitative researchers investigating the link between nature and well-being have advocated for the exploration of experiences, feelings, and interactions (Bell et al., 2015).

### The Human-Nature Relationship

Scholars have proposed several theoretical frameworks to explain the complexities of the human-nature relationship. In the Biophilia Hypothesis (1984), Wilson theorizes that as part of our biological legacy, humans have an innate need to focus on and affiliate with the natural world and are subsequently drawn to places, such as the sea, which have helped facilitate our survival. Nevertheless, empirical support for biophilia is limited (Joye & de Block, 2011; Soga & Gaston, 2016); and the literature is unclear as to whether the psychological benefits from exposure to nature are underpinned by innate or learned mechanisms (Cleary et al., 2017). Within ‘sense of place’ literature, specific natural environments are shown to develop strong personal meaning over time, and across four dimensions (Kyle et al., 2004): emotional attachment and belonging (‘affective attachment’); affirmation of values and identity through cognitive connection (‘place identity’); functional reliance for the attainment of goals and activities (‘place dependence’); and facilitation of relationships and shared experiences (‘social bonding’). Place-based attachment has been associated with hedonic well-being (e.g. Eyles &

Williams, 2008); but few studies have explored the link between exposure to nature, sense of place and eudemonic outcomes (Cleary et al., 2017).

Closely related to the concept of ‘sense of place’ is the idea of therapeutic landscapes (Gesler, 1992), where “the physical and built environments, social conditions and human perceptions combine to produce an atmosphere which is conducive to healing” (Gesler, 1996, p. 96). Early studies of therapeutic blue spaces focused on sites of healing and pilgrimage (e.g., Foley, 2011; Gesler, 1996 ); but more recently, researchers have begun to recognize the importance of everyday blue spaces, and their role in well-being restoration and enhancement (e.g., Bell et al., 2015; Denton & Aranda, 2020; Jellard & Bell, 2021; Pool et al., 2023).

### **The Sea and Well-Being**

Blue space research to date has established that increased exposure to the sea, or living near the coast, is linked with better self-reported mental health, general health and subjective well-being (Britton et al., 2020; Gascon et al., 2017; N. Smith et al., 2021; White et al., 2020, 2021). Evidence also suggests that spending time by the sea may offer greater benefits to well-being than either exposure to green spaces or to bodies of inland water (MacKerron & Mourato, 2013; Stieger et al., 2022). However, thus far, researchers have paid scant attention to *how* people engage with the sea, despite evidence demonstrating that the health and well-being benefits of nature are not simply linearly related to the amount of time spent within it (Martin et al., 2020; Richardson, Passmore, Lumber, Thomas, & Hunt, 2021; Yang et al., 2021). The type and quality of contact, and the extent to which individuals experience an emotional and experiential connection (‘nature connectedness’: Mayer & Frantz, 2004) with nature, have also been shown to influence the strength of the association between exposure to nature and well-being (Fudge et al., 2023; Martin et al., 2020; Richardson, Passmore, Lumber, Thomas, & Hunt, 2021).

Viewing the sea has been associated with better psychological and general health outcomes both longitudinally (Dempsey et al., 2018) and cross-sectionally (Garrett et al., 2019b). However, such quantitative studies are rare despite evidence suggesting that viewing blue space may be more psychologically beneficial than green space visibility (Garrett et al., 2019b; Nutsford et al., 2016). Narratives within qualitative studies have given insight into how looking at the sea may play a role in well-being outcomes. For example, looking at the sea has been shown to offer an escape from the stresses and responsibilities of modern life (Bell et al., 2015; Wright et al., 2024) and “relief from the oppression of the city” (Thomas, 2015, p. 192). Kelly (2018) described the role of the sea in emptying the mind of ‘cognitive noise,’ creating the mental space to reflect and connect with nature. Looking at the sea has also been shown to help with emotional regulation and increase subjective well-being by facilitating positive emotions of awe, joy, happiness, contentment, and nostalgia (e.g., Jellard & Bell., 2021; Pearce et al., 2017; Severin et al., 2022). However, the present study is the first to specifically focus on exploring the experience of looking out to sea from the land and how it may relate to well-being.

Informed by green space research, two restorative pathways have been proposed to be involved in underpinning the relationship between exposure to the sea and well-being. Within their Stress Recovery Theory (SRT), Ulrich et al. (1983, 1991) viewed the sea as a calming backdrop that reduces psychological distress by offering less sensory stimuli than a built-up urban environment. In their Attention Restoration Theory (ART), Kaplan and Kaplan (1989) posited that cognitive overload resulting from periods of sustained ‘directed attention’ could be mitigated by engaging with the natural environment. Natural vistas, such as the sea, have been claimed to provide ‘soft fascination,’ allowing the mind to disengage from more cognitively demanding daily distractions while providing enough sensory input to hold attention, hence restoring attentional capabilities. While, on balance, the blue space literature offers some

support for these restorative pathways (Georgiou et al., 2021), it is argued that there is most likely an intertwining of mechanisms that link different natural settings with well-being (Elliot et al., 2023). However, studies have yet to clarify how such mechanisms are interrelated, and how they may vary between individuals and contexts (Cleary et al., 2017; Elliot et al., 2023). Both SRT and ART explain how looking out to sea may lead to the *restoration* of well-being, but pathways linking exposure to blue space and well-being *promotion* are largely unexplored (Cleary et al., 2017). An individual's trait and state levels of nature connectedness (Mayer & Frantz, 2004) are argued to play a role in hedonic and eudemonic well-being enhancement (Capaldi et al., 2014; Pritchard et al., 2020); and to mediate the link between exposure to nature and well-being (Liu et al., 2022; Mayer et al., 2009). Nevertheless, while studies show that people feel more connected to specific natural settings after exposure to them (Mayer et al., 2009; Weinstein et al., 2009; Zou et al., 2022), it is recognized that this relationship is idiosyncratic and can vary in different contexts, and over time (Cleary et al., 2017). Thus, using qualitative research methods may provide the required sensitivity to illuminate the intricacies of these relationships, and clarify the causal pathways involved.

Drawing upon the extant literature, and recognizing the need to better understand the relationship between intentional exposure to the sea and well-being outcomes, this study aims to generate in-depth insights into the lived experience of looking out to sea for working women living in an English coastal city, by asking the following research questions:

1. What is their experience of looking out to sea?
2. What role, if any, does looking out to sea play in their experience of well-being?

## Methods

### Design

This study adopted an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA; J. A. Smith, 1996) methodology to explore the lived experience of participants in the context of looking out to sea and the meanings associated with that experience. IPA takes an idiographic, hermeneutic, and phenomenological approach, which, in the context of the present study, reflects a commitment to understanding how the inner experience of specific individuals is understood within the context of looking out to sea (J. A. Smith, 2017). IPA is considered appropriate for subject areas with limited existing research knowledge (J. A. Smith et al., 2009), as is the case within this field of study. The epistemological position was one of contextualism (Larkin et al., 2006), focusing on the individual-in-context and assuming reality is not singular but rather emerges from that specific situation and will be true in that context (Tebes, 2005). Hence, knowledge is considered local, provisional, and context-dependent (Jaeger & Rosnow, 1988). IPA also draws from hermeneutics as it involves a dual interpretative process in which the researcher tries to interpret the experience and meanings of the individual as they make sense of their own experience (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). However, I recognize that as the researcher, my interpretations of participants' experiences will be influenced by my interpretative biases.

### Participants

Consistent with the theoretical principles of the IPA methodology, a purposive sampling approach was adopted with an emphasis on representing the phenomenon, not the population (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). A broadly homogenous sample of four participants was recruited via the social media platform Facebook (see Table 1). Participant selection was based upon the following criteria: having a self-reported regular (more than once a week) fascination with looking out to sea; identifying as female; aged between 30-50 years; and living and working within the city of Brighton and Hove. Brighton and Hove was selected as the geographical study

area as it is a densely populated city of approximately 280,000 inhabitants (Office for National Statistics, 2021) located on the south coast of England.

**Table 1**

*Participant Demographics*

Pseudonym	Sex	Age	Occupation
Nancy	F	50	Senior Manager
Joanna	F	44	Marketing Officer
Jolene	F	40	Operations Manager
Carla	F	30	Designer

**Procedure**

Ethical approval was obtained from the University of East London, and the study adhered to the British Psychological Society (BPS) Code of Ethics and Conduct (2018). Potential participants were sent an invitation letter explaining the nature and purpose of the study, their right to withdraw at any time, and further information regarding ethics, confidentiality, and data protection. Four participants agreed to be interviewed and, prior to their interview, were asked to sign a consent form. Due to UK COVID-19 restrictions regarding in-person contact, interviews were conducted and recorded (video and audio) online using the Microsoft Teams software.

As the present study required the collection of rich, detailed, first-person accounts of the experience of looking out to sea, a one-to-one semi-structured interview method was used (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). The interview schedule was developed to allow participants to describe and explain, in-depth, their personal experiences of looking out to sea, and the meanings they attached to those experiences. The interview schedule consisted of 12 open-ended questions, plus prompts. Interviews began with questions that required primarily narrative or descriptive data to build rapport and encourage participants to feel comfortable discussing their experiences (e.g., “Typically, how often do you look out to sea?”; “And where do you look out to sea?”). Later, questions that required participants to be more analytical and explanatory were introduced (e.g., “Is there a desired outcome of looking out to sea for you?”; “If so, tell me about that?”). Prompts were used throughout to encourage participants to explain their experiences with greater depth and detail (e.g., “What is the significance of that for you?”; “Can you tell me what you were thinking and feeling?”). The interview schedule was employed flexibly to allow participants to take the interview in the direction they deemed important and central to their experience while enabling the researcher to gain an understanding related to the research questions. Participants were asked to look out to sea during the 24 hours prior to their interview to ease recall during their interview. Interviews lasted 60 to 100 minutes, after which participants were fully debriefed.

**Data Analysis**

Consistent with the IPA methodology, interview data was analyzed using a cyclical, iterative, and inductive approach (J. A. Smith, et al., 2009). The analytic focus was on participants’ attempts to make sense of their lived experiences of looking out to sea. The process of analysis moved from the particular to the shared and from description to interpretation.

Analysis of transcriptions sought to identify emergent patterns, or ‘themes’, in the data, considering convergence and divergence, similarity and nuance—initially for a single participant, then looking for patterns across all cases.

Interviews were conducted, transcribed, and analyzed by the first researcher to ensure in-depth familiarity and understanding of each participant’s experience. Interviews were manually transcribed, verbatim, prior to analysis, and each transcript was given a pseudonym to ensure participant confidentiality. Each transcript was analyzed using the stages detailed in J. A. Smith et al. (2009). First, after transcription, interviews were read, re-read, and listened to again to maximize familiarization. Second, each interview transcript was analyzed, line by line, and detailed exploratory notes were created to capture descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual elements relating to the research questions. For example, the initial analysis of Jolene’s interview data noted her rich descriptions of how ‘different seas’ (such as rough or calm) facilitated different emotional experiences. It also captured her use of phrases related to the experience of ‘embodying the sea,’ such as “ingesting” and “breathing with the sea.” Third, the researcher identified emergent themes for each participant, which were then grouped, and connections between themes were noted. Emergent themes were synthesized to generate main themes for that participant. For example, analysis of Carla’s interview identified numerous emergent themes—including the ‘the sea as a greater power,’ ‘spiritual connection,’ ‘mystery of the unknown’, and ‘gaining a broader perspective’—that were all interpreted as relating to a main theme of ‘self-transcendence.’ Stages 2 and 3 were repeated for the remaining participants to generate a list of main and subordinate themes for each individual. Fifth, the main themes for each participant were analyzed and synthesized to create a combined list of master and subordinate themes that best represented their experience (Figure 1). For example, during this stage, three of the main themes already identified—a place of connection’, ‘self-transcendence’, and ‘part of the self’—were combined to create the master theme of ‘part of self, greater than self.’

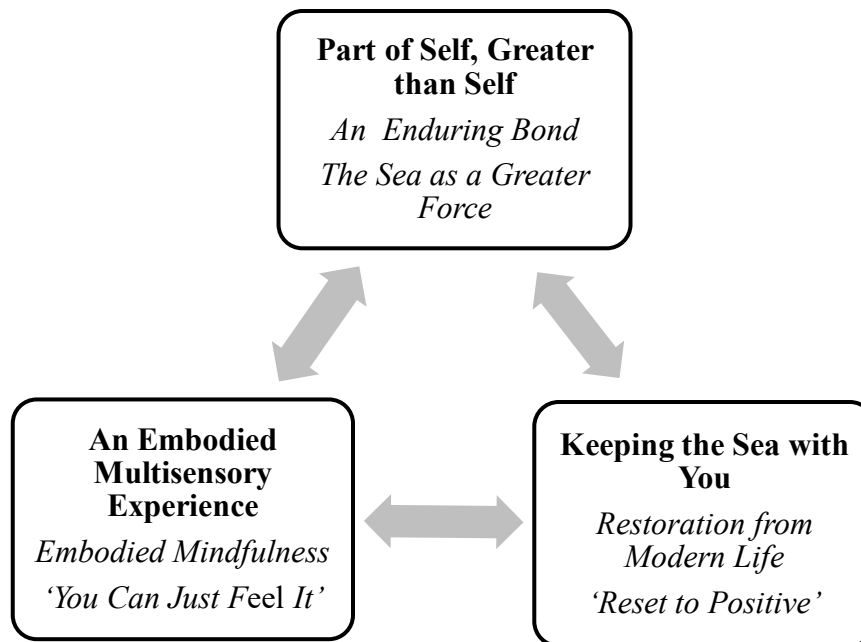
To ensure validity and rigor, the researcher engaged in regular discussions with an independent and experienced IPA researcher during the analytical process. To enhance objectivity, the researcher also maintained written and audio reflexive journals to increase awareness of personal assumptions, biases, and experiences relevant to the study.

## **Results**

Three interconnected master themes, each with two subordinate themes, emerged from the analysis, providing rich insight into the lived experience of looking out to sea for all participants (see Figure 1). The three master themes were: ‘Part of Self, Greater than Self’; ‘An Embodied, Multisensory Experience’; and ‘Keeping the Sea with You’. Each theme is discussed and evidenced by extracts from the transcripts of participant interviews. Overall, participants revealed their strong and enduring connection to, and love for, the sea, which was perpetuated by looking out onto the vast, awe-inspiring vista on a regular basis. For all participants, looking out to sea was a truly embodied experience that filled the senses, captivated the mind, and both restored and enhanced well-being.

**Figure 1**

*Master and Subordinate Themes*



*Note.* All master and subordinate themes had a prevalence of 4/4 participants.

### **Part of Self, Greater than Self**

For all participants, looking out to sea enabled them to connect with their inner self and to the world beyond. The sea was seen as a nurturing, constant companion they could always rely upon in good times and bad. Looking out to sea gave them a sense of perspective that transcended immediate fears and anxieties and gave them comfort and reassurance from knowing they were part of something greater than the self.

#### ***An Enduring Bond***

All participants expressed an enduring love and respect for the sea that began in childhood and continued throughout their adult lives. Whether participants had grown up living by the sea (Nancy and Carla) or had visited the coast on family holidays (Joanna and Jolene), the special bond they each shared with the sea was rooted in childhood memories. Looking out to sea still evoked the feelings of awe and wonder they had experienced as a child, when seaside holidays were “like going to Disneyworld” (Joanna), and they all wanted to be the first to call out “I can see the sea!” (Joanna). For Nancy, looking out to sea evoked bitter-sweet nostalgia for a “simpler life” of fewer worries and responsibilities, to which she yearned to return. For her, looking out to sea was experienced as:

*Going back to a period in time possibly that's um, you're freer, life is lighter um someone else is in control and takes responsibility for everything.*

As adults, looking out to sea was integral to all their lives, it was part of their identity: “a natural part of my sort of every day. I just really love it and can't imagine being without it” (Joanna); “a really regular part of my everyday life” (Nancy).

Given that the sea played a vital role in their lives, it was perhaps unsurprising that all participants stressed the importance of living close to the sea: “...if you're [living] near the sea,

you've got to be properly near it" (Nancy). Living in close proximity allowed looking out to sea to be part of daily life and ensured their bond with the sea was regularly maintained and protected. However, prior to their interview, participants claimed they had not been consciously aware of their strong connectedness to the sea. Instead, it had been experienced as an instinctive 'pull' towards the water:

*I guess that's the thing like apart from now when we are talking about it I've not really thought about it, it just sort of instinctively happens, and anywhere that I'm wanting to be, I feel very drawn to the sea 'cause I've....like that's the whole reason I moved to Brighton [ ]. It just feels more natural than that, it feels more....um, I dunno...in-built? I guess, yeah auto-pilot is the word that keeps coming up because I'm just sort of drawn to it naturally, and that's happening (Jolene).*

This strong bond did not simply represent a connection with nature per se, rather, participants viewed the sea as 'unique in nature'. Unlike green spaces, the sea was perceived as an active participant in a *relationship*, rather than simply as an inanimate and passive bystander:

*I guess for how I feel about the sea, and the series of interactions that I have with it, because they are so special, I suppose, and because how deeply I feel it is important to have time with the sea, and be close to the sea, that feels like a strong bond and a relationship [ ] yeah, I would say it's a relationship. Which I've never really thought about until now, but yeah, that's a nice thing to take away (Jolene).*

As adults, the rhythm of the sea represented a constant and reliable rhythm in their lives. The sea was always there to comfort and reassure and seemed to offer a form of non-human relatedness. For all, the sea as a comforting companion had been experienced even more keenly during the "uncertain, unpredictable world" (Joanna) of the pandemic:

*It's like, you know, a heartbeat, or a something that's kind of a constant you know and it's never ending. I guess there's something about that that you know that whatever else is going in there it's a kind of constant, it's a constant, it's not stopped by anything, it's reliable. Seems an odd word to say but you know it's always gonna be there, it's never gonna not be there (Nancy).*

### ***Sea as a Greater Force***

For all participants, looking out to sea expanded their awareness beyond self-boundaries and connected them to something "bigger than the self." Participants perceived the sea as a "greater force" in a literal sense, given its sheer scale and awe-inspiring power. However, this idea also represented a deeper spiritual connection with a unique part of the natural world. Looking out to sea shifted focus from 'self' to 'other,' allowing participants to move beyond insular concerns towards a more expansive sense of perspective in terms of their place in the universe:

*It's about just reminding you, you know, you are just one human being, choosing to live life in a certain way, and actually there's this huge great force out there um that is bigger than bigger than all these small things that we get caught up in in our daily lives um and it's that sense of being grounded and holding on to something [ ] that kind of that sense of just connecting (Nancy).*

Connecting to something "much bigger and more powerful and outside yourself" (Nancy) helped participants cope with their existential anxieties regarding feelings of disconnection from the natural world, lack of meaning in life, and fear of death. The permanence of the endless sea, which will exist long after they do, was, perhaps



counterintuitively, experienced as reassuring and comforting. Feeling small and insignificant in comparison to the vast, powerful sea was experienced positively because it brought the realization that it was their problems and anxieties that did not matter, not them as human beings. Joanna struggled to find the right words to express how fears around her own mortality were somehow diminished by looking out onto the vast expanse:

*It's kinda like a bit of a sort of a morbid thing but I think if I was like really really worried about something [ ] I don't know like we are only here for sort of like specks of time kind of thing and that's kind of quite sort of reassuring if you sort of if you really were like sat there worrying about, I dunno, like a bad diagnosis or something, [ ] it makes you feel a bit better about things. I dunno it's hard to put into words about how it makes me feel [ ] I think if you feel smaller cause something else is so big it puts your problems into perspective. I think that's kind of what I mean about it.*

Recognizing they were part of a “bigger picture” inspired the search for greater knowledge of themselves as individuals and of the wider universe to which they were connected. Carla tried to make sense of her quest to explore her inner and external world while experiencing an almost pleasurable conflict between the need for knowledge and the need for mystery:

*I like that feeling of 'I need to know more' and like, you know, like that kind of feeling where you can't put a book down, you wanna, you wanna read, you want to read more, you want to know more [ ] It's strange one, isn't it? I don't feel like I need to know everything. I quite like not knowing everything, um, which is strange to hear.*

### **An Embodied Multisensory Experience**

For all participants, looking out to sea was a powerful, multisensory experience that connected body, senses, mind, and place. The sights, sounds, smells, and rhythmic movement of the sea came together to provide a rich, embodied experience that held their attention in the present moment. As the sea changed, so did their experience. But it was always pleasurable; it always made them “feel good.”

#### ***'You Can Just Feel It'***

For all participants, the multisensory experience of looking out to sea was unique in nature and captivated them every time. Their accounts were rich with reference to pleasurable embodied sensations, emotions, and cognitions, and their awareness of corporeal responses to what they saw, smelt, and heard. For all participants, looking out to sea was rarely a passive, purely visual activity. Instead, it was a fully immersive, awe-inspiring experience: “Wow, look look at that, look at that, that's nature. That's amazing” (Carla).

While the experience was always multisensory, and always positive, it did change as the sea changed, as their thoughts, feelings, and emotions were perceived to *mirror* the sea. Jolene encapsulated a recurrent theme of ‘beating the same rhythm as the sea’:

*I'm doing whatever the sea is doing, so when it's really calm, then I feel really calm, and I sort-of match....I guess I match what I see or hear, so when it's really super flat and it's really calm I'm just like 'aaah, I'm so like floaty, and sleepy and calm' and then, when it's all churned up, then I'm all like 'uurgh, let's go do something, I've got so much energy!' [ ] I feel like it's just matchy-matchy.*

Participants recalled being captivated by the constant motion of the water. It was described as having an embodied hypnotic quality when combined with the sounds of the waves on the shore and the movement of the stones as they fell away with the water. Nancy described the rhythmic familiarity of the sea and the “constant churning, swirling” that drew her in and held her gaze. This rhythmic motion was perceived to set the sea apart from other nature. While the sea was experienced as alive, active, and immersive, green spaces—such as parks or woodland—were viewed as static and passive. When calm, the sea seemed to gently seep into body and mind, eliciting positive emotions and feelings of serenity:

*A calm sea, very pretty, maybe a bit more relaxing, it makes me feel calm, uhm, it makes me feel happy, maybe I'll take a picture, uhm yeah, so maybe the calmness is more of a more of a happy feeling, happy calm feeling.* (Carla).

In contrast, looking out onto a powerful, rough sea was a more intense embodied experience. Participants felt as though they could, literally and figuratively, *ingest* the active, energizing sea into their bodies as it combined with the air around them. Jolene repeatedly inhaled deeply as she spoke:

*One of the things that I really like is that the air feels cleaner, and it feels, like on one of those days when it's all churned up, or even on a day when it's really hot and it's a little bit smelly, you can still smell the sea and you feel....just feel healthy and you can breathe in a lot and I do that more on the days where it's really active, and the sea's churning around and I do a lot of (inhales) 'cause I feel like I must be ingesting the salt like you can buy a salt pipe, or one of those salt lamps to get you know salt ions into your life. I'm like well I live right next to the sea I might as well just go, open my mouth and go (inhales).* (Jolene)

### ***Embodied Mindfulness***

For all participants, looking out to sea was an effortless way to achieve much needed, and sought-after, mindful moments. Those “sea and me” (Jolene) moments represented precious alone time, and looking out to sea was perceived to be more beneficial when experienced as a solo activity. All professed to struggle with meditation but claimed that they were able to achieve mindful awareness simply by looking out on the vast, seemingly endless expanse of the sea: “I have to make an effort to meditate, and I always feel like I’m doing it wrong whereas I go down to the sea and it just happens” (Jolene).

The sea provided just enough pleasurable multisensory stimulation to captivate and hold participants in the present moment. The sights, sounds, smells, and movement of the sea were perceived to act like an embodied guided meditation. The sea was likened to a “3D meditation app” (Joanna), that fully occupied mind, body, and senses and so blocked out all other distractions:

*I can't do it with nothing. I can't simply just clear my mind of anything so actually something like the sea on a on a shingle beach particularly you've got that...the waves come in and they drag the shingle out [ ] the sea is enough of a noise, and enough of a visual experience, just to kind of push anything else out so you can have a moment or two of being, you know, a 100% present.* (Nancy).

Joanna tried to make sense of how the lack of visual distraction helped her be mindful and realized that looking out over a vast, empty expanse “that’s so big, that’s so uncluttered can help sort of unclutter your mind.” For all, the constant, rhythmic movement of the water seemed to re-set the brain and was perceived to physically empty the contents of the mind:

*While I'm sat there looking out to sea I feel like all of that sort-of 'busyness' in my brain drains away or evaporates [ ] I guess it sort of feels like its washing away... so each time that the sea is coming back and forwards it's very easy to feel like all of this stuff is draining away and sort of if anything like a puddle running back into the sea. It's like I feel like water all joining to itself. (Jolene).*

Carla reflected on how experiencing different seas seemed to facilitate different types of mindful moments. For her, a rough sea was perceived to demand her attention, whereas the calm sea was more gently persuasive. Although she recognized that whatever the prevailing sea conditions were, its awe-inspiring beauty always fully engaged her attention in the present. Whatever the nature of the sea, mindful 'sea and me' moments were best experienced alone, with participants seeking to be "enveloped by the sea" and feel "like I'm in a bubble" (Jolene). For Nancy, looking out to sea as a solo experience represented a rare gift of momentary self-care. It helped her escape from her hectic life, "giving me enough, to give me permission just to stop and be there, present." Social interactions were claimed to distract from the multisensory pleasure of looking out to sea and to dilute the perceived benefits. In general, looking out to sea was best experienced as an intentional solitary activity if it were to take participants to the calm place they sought:

*...the benefit is I think is probably quite diluted when you're sort of with friends but the sort of the benefit of being on your own um is that you can hear the waves and you can sort of take like take in sort of solitude [ ] and then your focus becomes the sea where as your focus isn't the sea when you're with friends it's just it's a nice setting [ ] It would be it would be a distraction having people around you (Joanna).*

### **Keeping the Sea with You**

Looking out to sea was not only enjoyed as a pleasurable embodied experience but was also used as a reliable and free well-being resource. The sea was perceived as vital to the restoration and promotion of participants' psychological (and to a lesser extent physical) health. However, the desired outcomes sought by participants had typically not been within conscious awareness prior to their interview. While participants perceived that the benefits of looking out to sea might change as the nature of the sea changed, this activity always facilitated positive well-being outcomes—both during 'sea and me' moments and upon returning to daily life.

### ***Restoration from Modern Life***

For all participants, looking out to sea provided a welcome antidote to the stressors of modern life. It was proactively and frequently used as a coping mechanism. The sea provided not only a visual escape from the urban world but effortlessly held participants' attention in the present, allowing valuable moments of respite from "the chattering monkey" (Nancy) in their minds. This liberation from the pressures and responsibilities of their lives helped restore psychological well-being both in the moment, and when they returned to normal life:

*I think it's about reliving pressure. It's um it's a kind of it's like a valve in terms of you know that you can just sort of .... Take a breath and feel freer, lighter um and get things back in perspective um feeling calm [ ] for me it is it is just fundamental to mental health and well-being [ ] all that kind of stuff you have to constantly... which is pressing down on you it...which is urban life, capitalism, full-time job, being a mum, it's just somehow it's it a pressure relief. I guess, it's a kind of....quite liberating. (Nancy).*

For Jolene, it was the action of the water itself that seemed to drain away stress and anxiety, giving her brain “a little break”:

*It's a bit like if my skull was a tank of water and you pulled the plug out and the water line is going 'blub, blub, blub, blub, blub' until my brain is like an empty sink but that's how I feel like looking at the sea. I just feel like things are sort-of drifting away, sort of coming out [ ] without me sort-of thinking about it. (Jolene)*

As an active partner in their relationship, the sea helped participants manage the challenging emotions and anxieties they had experienced. Just as the sea could be calm or rough, so could life. Through talking, Carla realized she had consciously sought time alone with the sea to deal with difficult emotional states during her teenage and adult years. Watching the loud, rough sea allowed her to accept her own similarly messy, angry emotions. Then, as if without effort, the sea was perceived to take away those emotions, leaving her calm and restored:

*Probably is conscious actually ...um yeah, 'cause thinking about when I used to escape from the house when I was a teenager, I just knew I was going I was going to that one beach and I would just sit there angrily and then I'd go back and I'd feel fine. And if I'm in Brighton [ ] if I'm, you know, upset whatever, then I'll just go out the house sometimes without saying anything. Just go. Yeah.... definitely... always towards the sea. (Carla)*

Later, Nancy described looking out to sea as a window to a simpler, less stressful world. The busy, urban world of responsibility and pressure was literally – and figuratively – behind her, and the awe-inspiring natural world, unsullied by humans, in front:

*The madness of all everything that goes on in the world you know you're just.... Sit on the beach and that's it...you're at the edge of the country and there's nothing out there [ ] I love that just sense of you know life is all behind you...all that busyness, all that hecticness. I travel all over the South-East I travel, all over London, but when I'm on the beach that's it.... You are just at the edge of the country and it's kind of everything's behind you and you've just got nothing in front of you. (Nancy)*

### ***'Reset to Positive'***

The sea not only restored but was also perceived to *enhance* psychological and physical functioning for participants. Looking out to sea was a self-regulating behavior that, consciously and unconsciously, “put more pennies in the jar” (Jolene) by promoting well-being outcomes that participants took back into their daily lives. As encapsulated by Jolene:

*It's like the end of a yoga stretch where you're just like 'ooh that's good, I feel a bit lighter, I feel more relaxed' a bit more, you know, like the old saying of 'having a spring in your step.' I feel like that, I feel a bit more ready to cope with everything. (Jolene)*

Nancy tried to make sense of how the sea enhanced her psychological and physical health:

*My breathing is deeper, and that in itself then calms you, it just allows you, you know, I'd be interested to see what happens to blood pressure, and to metabolism 'cause you know you can feel it you know, it's just that, you know, calming effect. And I'm sure there's a physiological side to that as well as the psychological side. (Nancy)*

Joanna repeatedly recounted the physical health benefits of ingesting the fresh salty sea air, cleansing her body, and calming her mind: “You’ve done your body good even if that’s even if

it's not in terms of exercise, just in terms of breath." For her, the sea was a well-being amplifier that she had integrated into every aspect of her regular well-being program:

*It just it just takes everything you are doing for your well-being to a sort of another level so you know it's like I was saying like meditation is good for you in a house, running is good for you on a busy road [ ] but you know there's all these things you can do that are good for you and then add....put....move them by the sea and then it just takes it takes it up another notch. (Joanna)*

Carla was surprised by the realization that there was a temporal dimension to her experience, as she subconsciously sought different outcomes at different times of the day. In the morning looking out to sea helped her feel more confident and in control, giving her effortless inspiration for her work as a designer. The sea brought "clarity, I'm calmer, I'm more rational um probably better to be around um can probably have better conversations [ ] kinder to other people and to myself." On the evening walk home, looking out to sea was a "route to relaxation" and used as a "sort of treatment." The idea of the sea as a low-investment well-being treatment was echoed by other participants, as it represented a boundless, free resource that they were lucky and privileged to have in their everyday life:

*I think people pay a fortune for like luxury spas to feel as relaxed as you can feel when you are just concentrating on the sea um so to have that for free [ ] did make me think definitely 100% like 'god, how lucky are we to have this?' (Joanna).*

In summary, for the participants in this study, looking out to sea was an awe-inspiring, intrinsically motivated, intentional activity which was integral to their lives. The sea was a loved, respected, and nurturing companion, experienced as part of their identity and a connection with the world beyond self-boundaries. For all, looking out to sea was an embodied multisensory experience that captivated them in the present moment and restored and enhanced their well-being every time.

## **Discussion**

This study aimed to explore the lived experience of looking out to sea for women living and working in the English coastal city of Brighton and Hove; and understand if, and how, this experience played a role in their well-being. Analysis of participant accounts revealed that each had a strong and enduring bond with the sea as part of self and transcending the self. Looking out to sea was shown to be a multisensory, embodied experience that effortlessly captivated and held their attention in the present moment. This special relationship and embodied experience were perceived to play an important role in the restoration and enhancement of well-being outcomes for each participant. These results support previous findings that living in close proximity to the coast, and increased exposure to blue space, is positively related to psychological and physical well-being (Britton et al., 2020; Gascon et al., 2017; N. Smith et al., 2021; White et al., 2020); and offers insights into how the embodied sensory, perceptual and emotional aspects of this experience may be involved in the pathways that link looking out to sea and well-being.

## **Illuminating the Human-Sea Relationship**

The powerful emotional response to, and special bond with, the sea that all participants recall began in childhood supports Kellert's (2005) interpretation of the biophilia hypothesis as an affective affiliation towards specific aspects of the natural world resulting from genetically prepared learning. Participants' bond with the sea did not seem to reflect an affiliation with all nature, but rather, participants described being instinctively drawn towards the sea as unique.

The enduring close connection participants felt for their coastal locale was also evidence of affective attachment and place identity (Kyle et al., 2004). Participants described their strong emotional response and sense of belonging when looking out from Brighton and Hove Beach specifically and believed the sea to be integral to their self-identity. All professed the importance of living near the sea and recalled how their attachment to their local blue space had developed over time (Smaldone et al., 2008) and was linked to past memories and experiences (Degnen, 2016). Perceiving the sea to be a constant companion, which can always be relied upon for psychological support and healing, also seems to align with the concept of the sea as a therapeutic landscape (Gesler, 1992). Overall, the human-sea relationship evidenced in this study was one of an innate, emotional, and experiential attachment to, and identification with, the sea as a place of unique therapeutic and salutogenic benefit.

### **Looking Out to Sea and Well-Being**

Looking out to sea was perceived to play a role in enhancing the subjective well-being (SWB; Diener, 1984) of participants, supporting literature linking residential proximity to the coast, and exposure to blue space, with increased positive affect (Brereton et al., 2008; Mackerron & Mourato, 2013; Severin, 2022). For all, the sea facilitated powerful positive emotions of love, awe, joy, contentment, excitement, amazement, and serenity. Looking out to sea always promoted a sense of improved subjective well-being while simultaneously ‘washing away’ negative feelings of stress and anxiety. The extent to which the sea was perceived as promoting hedonic aspects of well-being in all participants supports Mackerron and Mourato’s (2013) robust findings that self-reported happiness was highest amongst individuals spending time at marine and coastal margins compared to those in urban or green space environments.

Participant accounts suggested that looking out to sea may help facilitate well-being in part through enhancing physical and mental energy. All participants described the energizing nature of the sea—especially when it was rough—that they believed increased their mental and physical resources. This association between looking out to sea and experiencing greater vitality supports Ryan et al.’s (2010) experimental findings that being in nature positively predicts subjective vitality, even after accounting for social interactions and physical activity. In their meta-analysis, Capaldi et al. (2014) also found that experiencing a connection with nature was positively associated with happiness and vitality.

For participants, the simple act of regularly looking out to sea may have also promoted well-being by helping to satisfy their basic psychological need for relatedness and autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Cleary et al. (2017) proposed that ‘nature relatedness’ may represent a non-human form of relatedness and potentially account for how having a connection to nature facilitates eudemonic well-being. In their literature review, Baxter and Pelletier (2019) concluded that the need to feel a secure cognitive, emotional, and physical connection to nature is a basic human psychological requirement if individuals are to achieve mental well-being. Hence, experiencing a strong sense of connection and belonging when looking out to the sea—while personifying the sea as an active contributor within a perceived relationship—may fulfill the need for non-human relatedness. Experiencing a close bond with the sea may have been indicative of high *trait* nature connectedness (Mayer & Frantz, 2004) as this has been associated with strong self-identification with nature and personal well-being (Pritchard et al., 2020) - as evidenced by participants in this study. Additionally, frequent visits to nature have been associated with increases in state nature connectedness (Richardson, Cormack, McRobert, & Underhill, 2016a), and regular exposure to blue space has been linked with improved psychological health and well-being (Garrett et al., 2019b; White et al., 2021). Hence, through the experience of regularly looking out to sea, participants may have been ‘topping up’ their level of nature connectedness and further strengthening their bond with the sea. The sea may also help satisfy the psychological need for autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2000), as looking out to

sea was recalled as a solitary, self-initiated behavior that participants chose and controlled to achieve intrinsically motivated rewards related to the restoration and enhancement of their well-being.

In the present study, looking out to sea was perceived as a self-transcendent experience, which provided participants with a spiritual connection to the natural world. Self-transcendence is argued to be a source of meaning in life (Steger, 2009; Wong, 1998) and has been shown to have a direct relationship with well-being, as well as mediating the effects of psychological stressors and existential anxieties on health (Reed, 2018). Previous research has demonstrated a link between nature and spirituality (Naor & Maysseless, 2020; Ryff, 2021); with both atheists and those with religious beliefs agreeing with the term *spirituality* when it was used in relation to an appreciation of nature (Caldwell-Harris et al., 2008). Within Wong's (2011) theory of chaironic happiness, experiencing oneness with nature through looking out to sea may be viewed as "an existential spiritual pathway to happiness" leading to "feeling blessed and fortunate because of a sense of awe, gratitude" (p. 70). In support of Reed (2018) and Wong (2011), the immense scale, awe-inspiring beauty, and comforting permanence of the sea gave participants a more expansive sense of perspective and helped alleviate their insular and existential concerns. Believing that their worries and anxieties were insignificant, not them as human beings, gave meaning to their lives - recognized as a dimension of eudemonic well-being within PWB (Ryff, 1989) and PERMA (Seligman, 2011).

### **An Intertwining of Body, Mind, Senses and Place**

For all participants, their bond with the sea, and the well-being benefits they perceived to derive from its vast expanse, were strongly linked with experiencing looking out to the sea as an intertwining of body, senses, mind, and place. Encounters with the sea were always recalled as embodied, multisensory experiences, compared to green space encounters which were perceived as static and passive. Embodiment has been defined as "an awareness of and responsiveness to bodily sensations" (Impett et al., 2006, p. 40); and results from this study support the radical view of embodiment that the body, mind, and external environment are not separate but instead interrelated in a complex manner (Hefferon, 2015). Every time they looked out to sea, participants recalled experiencing pleasurable embodied sensations, emotions, and cognitions and feeling their bodily awareness and responsiveness to the visual, auditory, and olfactory stimuli provided by the sea. The rhythm of the sea was like the rhythm of life—a constant heartbeat that also connected them to a force greater than the self. As the nature of the sea changed, their journey from multisensory embodiment to lived experience also changed. A calm sea promoted feelings of peace, contentment, relaxation, and serenity, while a rough sea facilitated awe, excitement, and vitality. The well-being outcomes may have changed, but their experience was always pleasurable and always made them feel good.

Through the multisensory experience of looking out to sea, participants recalled consistently and effortlessly achieving a state of embodied mindfulness that eluded them elsewhere in their lives. Mindfulness is conceptualized here as "paying attention in a particular way, on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally" (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, p. 4). Participant accounts supported Huynh and Torquati's (2019) findings that the relationship between connection to nature and psychological well-being was mediated by mindfulness. The mindful moments described by participants were grounded in bodily experiences such as feeling enveloped by the sea, sensing the ebb and flow of the tide on the shingle, and ingesting fresh salty sea air. Analysis suggested that, within the context of looking out to sea, participants were able to effortlessly integrate bottom-up somatosensory inputs with top-down cognitions, emotions, and perceptions to reliably achieve a state of calm, pleasurable, embodied mindfulness (Khoury et al., 2017).

Participant accounts offered support for stress reduction and attentional restoration as potential pathways between looking out to sea and well-being. Participants described how the vast, empty sea provided visual respite from their busy, urban lives and allowed them to block out all other distractions. In this way, looking at the sea facilitated restoration from stress and anxiety, as proposed in the Stress Reduction Theory (SRT; Ulrich, 1983; Ulrich et al., 1991). Findings from the present study also supported Kaplan and Kaplan's (1989) ART, as participants recalled how the sights, sounds, smells and rhythmic movement of the water provided just enough stimulation to captivate and hold their attention in the present moment. Thus, looking out to sea allowed them to disengage from their cognitively demanding lives and re-set their mental capabilities.

In summary, as an embodied, multisensory experience, looking out to sea was perceived to reliably promote the positive affective aspects of well-being within the conceptions of SWB and PERMA; and to enhance eudemonic dimensions of meaning, connectedness/relatedness, vitality, and autonomy within the concepts of PWB, SDT and PERMA. Notably, the present study demonstrated the importance of mind *and* body in the experience of well-being outcomes. Hedonic and eudemonic theories have traditionally taken a 'neck-up' approach to well-being, neglecting to consider the role of sensory experiences and bodily states (Brani et al., 2014; Hefferon, 2015). However, in support of Hefferon (2015), results from this study suggest that participants considered corporeal experience as integral, rather than added-on, when they reflected upon how the experience of looking out to sea was linked to their well-being.

### **Limitations**

While this study provides insights into the phenomenological experience of looking out to sea and how it may relate to well-being, it has limitations that future research should seek to address. The IPA methodology necessitates a small, homogenous sample, and participants in this study were all Caucasian, British, and professional females. Hence, the findings cannot be generalized to the wider population. Future research should sample from more diverse age, gender, socio-economic, and cultural groups. This study represents a snapshot of how participants uniquely interpreted their experience of looking out to sea, and the relationship it had with their well-being; rather than offering more robust evidence of correlation, or causality, over time. Larger qualitative and quantitative studies, including longitudinal research, are recommended to explore and validate the findings of this study. Participants self-reported as having an enduring connection to the sea, which may indicate a high level of trait nature connectedness or reflect ongoing state nature connectedness that remains high due to the regularity of looking out to sea. Both trait and state nature connectedness should be measured in further research, as this may have implications for well-being outcomes.

### **Future Research**

While a growing body of literature has demonstrated the link between blue space exposure and well-being, findings have typically been correlational and based on simple measures of residential proximity or visit frequency. Thus far, researchers have paid less attention to *how* people engage with the sea, despite studies demonstrating that the health and well-being benefits of nature are not just linearly related to the amount of time spent within it (Martin et al., 2020; Richardson, Passmore, Lumber, Thomas, & Hunt, 2021). Qualitative studies have begun to explore relationships between actual sea-immersion experiences (e.g., swimming, surfing, and sailing) and health and well-being outcomes (e.g., Britton & Foley, 2021; Denton & Aranda, 2020; Lisahunter & Stoodley, 2021; Pipere et al., 2020; Thompson & Wilkie, 2021) but have rarely considered the potential benefits of engaging with the sea from the land. Nevertheless, the present study suggests that the simple act of regularly looking out to



sea may play an important role in restoring and promoting both hedonic and eudemonic well-being outcomes. Hence, there is an opportunity to build on the findings of the present idiographic research with larger-scale studies that draw from more diverse sample populations. This would help clarify our understanding of how, when, and for whom looking out to sea from the land may be related to specific well-being outcomes. In addition, while looking out to sea may be a simple, low-cost, and relatively accessible way to engage with the sea, it may not have appeal - or benefits - for all. As such, there also remains a need to understand the perceived - and actual - barriers and motivations, benefits and costs, of looking out to sea for different sample populations who may or may not currently engage in this activity.

There is an opportunity for researchers in this field to employ a broader range of data collection methods. Previously, blue space researchers have, for example, accompanied participants on 'go along' interviews to capture their experiences in context, in real-time (e.g., Bell et al., 2015). In other studies, 'go-pro' cameras and video diaries (e.g., Bates & Moles, 2023) and participatory videos (e.g., Fisher et al., 2021) have allowed participants agency in terms of how they express their personal experiences. Given the inherent challenges involved in trying to capture the emotional, cognitive, and experiential essence of a predominantly solo activity, such as looking out to sea, future studies in this area may benefit from using such self-directed methods to collect data. For example, asking participants to take photographs and/or record video or audio diaries 'in the moment', as they are looking out to sea, may allow access to the psychological and physiological processes and outcomes that are hard to recall—in depth and accurately—in retrospective interviews.

Results from the present study, although exploratory, suggest that encounters with the sea may be associated with different experiences and outcomes compared to green space exposure. This supports previous research suggesting that looking at blue space may offer more psychological benefits than green space visibility (Garrett et al., 2019b; MacKerron & Mourato, 2013; Nutsford et al., 2016). However, few studies have investigated how different types of nature are experienced and valued, or how individual differences may be involved (Cleary et al., 2017; Richardson, Passmore, Lumber, Thomas, & Hunt, 2021). Hence, there is an opportunity for qualitative and quantitative inquiry into how, for whom, and in which contexts the relationship between exposure to the sea and well-being outcomes may differ from the association between green space and well-being. Existing research suggests that there may be differences between green and blue spaces in terms of the specific mechanisms involved in their relationship with well-being, and their relative importance (Georgiou et al., 2021; White et al., 2020). However, few studies have considered if and how different pathways may link different types of blue space engagement with well-being. As such, there is an opportunity to better understand how the framework of pathways that link engaging with the sea from the land and well-being may differ from the mechanisms associated with other types of blue and green space contact.

The suggestion within this study that looking at the sea offers different and/or additional well-being benefits compared to other forms of nature may be related to the embodied, multi-sensory essence of the experience, in which therapeutic and salutogenic outcomes seem to emerge through the relationship between person and place. To date, the blue space and well-being literature has typically relied on single-item, or short-scale measures of subjective well-being or psychological distress. However, qualitative researchers have begun to illuminate our understanding of how activities that take place in or on the sea may facilitate both hedonic and eudemonic well-being outcomes. Future research should continue to unpick the complex intertwining of body, mind, senses, and environment that seems to be experienced when people engage with the sea from the land and clarify how this may link to a more inclusive conception of well-being.

## Conclusion

The present study was the first to explore, in depth, how the simple act of regularly looking out to sea can play a central role in facilitating a strong sense of connectedness to the natural world and help restore and enhance well-being. Participant experiences revealed an instinctive and enduring bond with the sea as integral to self-identity and as a spiritual connection to something greater than the self. Looking out to sea was shown to be a powerful, embodied, multisensory experience that filled body, mind, and senses and facilitated restoration from stressful urban life. These findings add to the growing body of evidence that engaging with the sea – in this case from the land – is associated with benefits for mental, emotional, and physical well-being. Importantly, results suggest that benefiting from engagement with the sea does not necessitate immersion in, or on, the water but may be achieved by simply looking out onto the vast, blue vista. Hence, this study helps build our understanding of how different types of engagements with a range of natural environments may differentially impact health and well-being outcomes.

Findings from this study, alongside previous research demonstrating the health and well-being benefits of blue space interventions (Britton et al., 2020), are of relevance to policymakers and health professionals. Taking part in nature-based interventions (NBI's) has been shown to benefit those with and without recognized mental health problems (Britton et al., 2020; Coventry et al., 2021; Haywood et al., 2024). However, most interventions reported to date have taken place in green spaces - or have involved engagement in activities in or on the water, such as swimming, surfing, or sailing. However, such activities may require specific skills, be costly in terms of time and money, and potentially have limited appeal. In contrast, interventions that involve looking out to sea from the land may be an accessible and low-cost way to derive well-being benefits from the sea. Hence, there is an opportunity for future research to evaluate the potential of 'sea gazing' interventions that may facilitate mental health and well-being outcomes in clinical and non-clinical populations.

While the present study demonstrates that engaging with the sea from the land may have value as a well-being practice, it is recognized that more research is needed to determine if these findings are generalizable. Larger scale qualitative and quantitative studies, with more diverse sample populations, are required to aid our understanding of how, when, and for whom looking out to sea from the land may lead to well-being benefits. In addition, the sea is not easily accessible to everyone and may not have appeal for all. Better understanding the inhibitors and motivators, advantages and disadvantages, of looking out to sea for different sample populations is essential if policymakers and practitioners are to take advantage of the well-being potential of this simple, low-cost activity. As increasing global urbanization risks further accelerating our physical and psychological disconnection from the natural world, the need to better understand and harness the well-being benefits of looking out to sea has never been greater.

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### Notes on Contributors

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