An exploration of perceptions and connections to 'nature'

Lissy Fehnker, PhD Student
Massey University
Auckland, New Zealand

Session:
Environmental Management in Dynamic
Social-Ecological Systems

Aim of this PhD Research

To provide a deeper understanding of how people relate to the natural world, what influences these relationships and the potential outcomes which can contribute towards more informed environmental management outcomes.

Objectives of this PhD Research

Explore the varying perceptions of 'nature'

- 1. How do people perceive nature?
- 2. What do people associate with nature?
- 3. Do people associate negative/positive aspects to nature?
- 4. What influences a person's perception of nature?

Explore connections to nature

- 1. What do people think a connection to nature is?
- 2. Do people have a connection to nature?
- 3. How <u>interconnected</u> do people feel they are with nature?
- 4. What influences a person's connection to nature?

Explore people's pro-environmental practices and perspectives, and what may influence these

- 1. What pro-environmental practices do people partake in?
- 2. What pro-environmental perspectives do people hold?
- 3. Do perceptions of nature, or, connections to nature influence these practices or perspectives?
- 4. What other factors may influence these practices or perspectives?

Implications for environmental management

1. How can the findings from this research provide solutions for future environmental/sustainability challenges?

Summary of Initial Problem Statement

- Degradation to the natural world and species extinction is widely acknowledged by the scientific community and global population
- Auckland is facing exponential population growth, and has a deteriorating environment
- It has been argued that disconnect between humans and nature is what contributes to this degradation (globally)
- Little research on how people perceive 'nature'
- Humans play the most significant role in environmental damage therefore we must take into consideration what drives these behaviors for effective environmental management solutions
- Currently, environmental sciences struggle to integrate social processes to address environmental problems
- No research previously in Auckland (study area), or, New Zealand which is in any way remotely connected to this theme

Study Area, Methods & Sample Size



Research Methods

- Online survey via Qualtrics
- Face to face interviews (to come)

Sample Size

• 963 participants

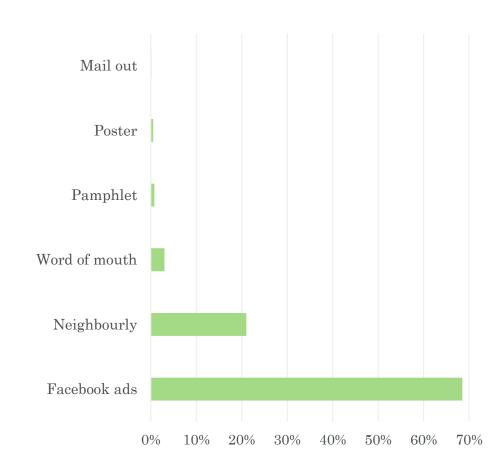
Auckland population -1,657,000

= 99% confidence interval, 5% margin of error

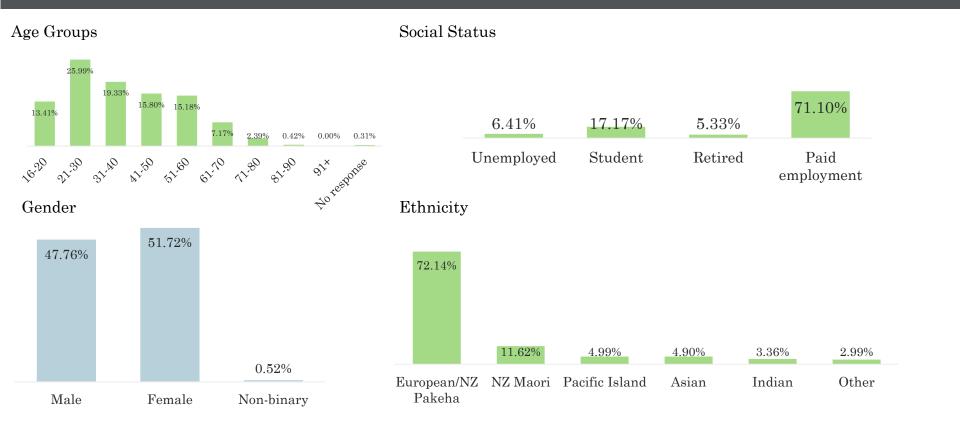
Survey Structure

qualtrics.[™]

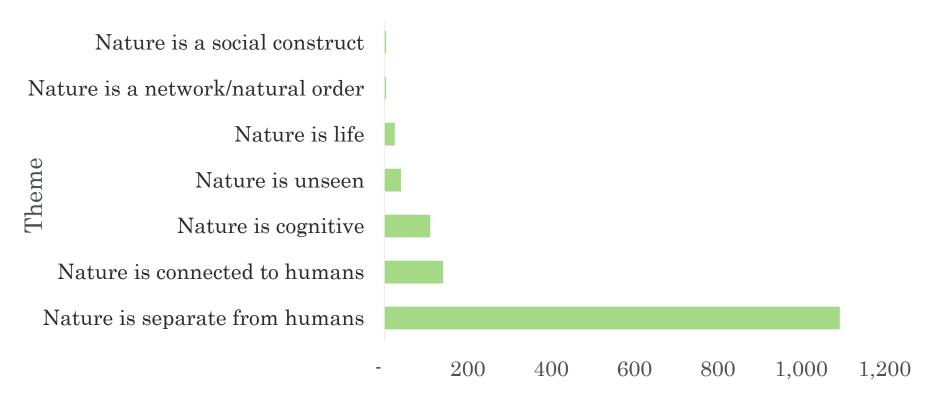
- 35 questions
- Average time to complete = 20 minutes
- Started with demographic questions, then perceptions of nature, then connections to nature and lastly pro-environmental perceptions and practices
- Mixture of long answers and tick-boxes
- Participants had options to elaborate on every question if they wished
- Goal least restrictions as poss
- Number of methods used to promote survey, i.e. Facebook ads, Neighbourly, pamphlet drops, mail outs, posters



Demographics of Participants



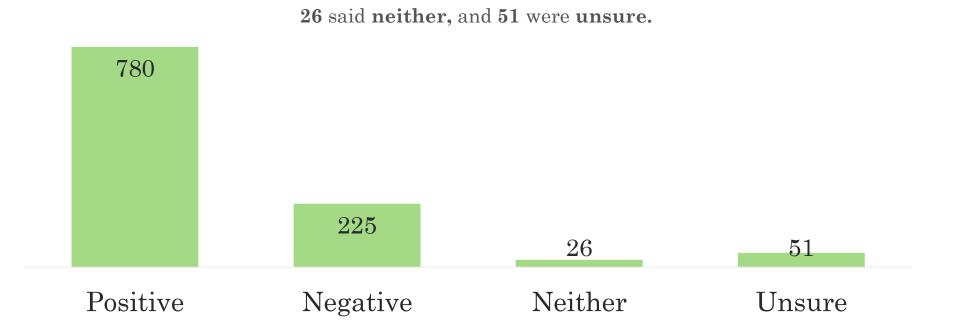
Results: What is 'nature'? - Perceptions

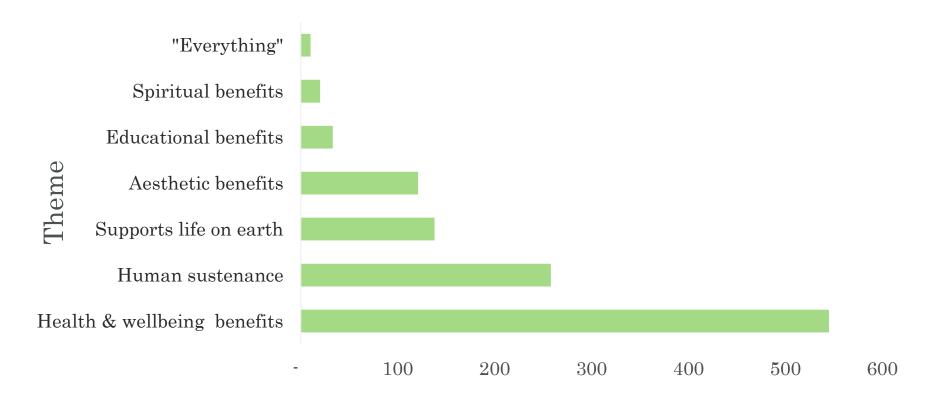


References to categories within theme

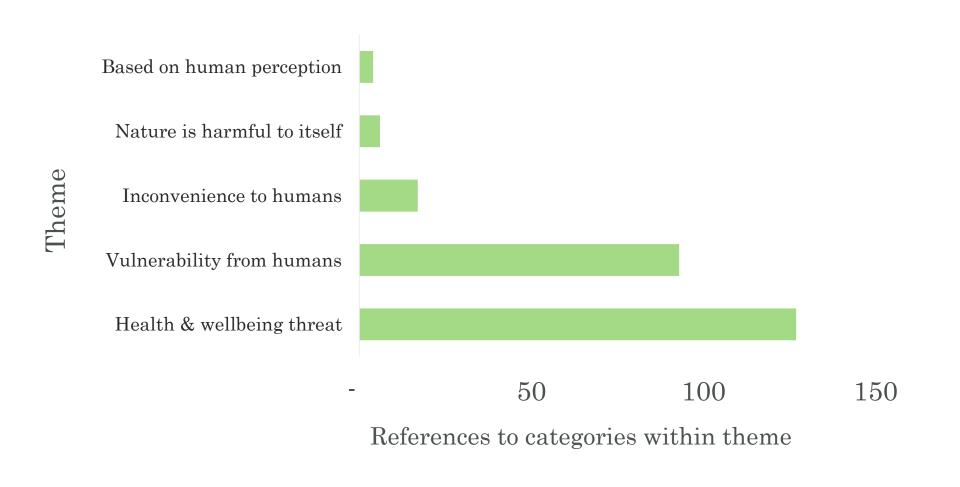
When asked whether there were any positive or negative aspects related to nature, the most common response was **positive aspects** selected by **780** respondents.

In contrast, 225 respondents said there were negative aspects.





References to categories within theme



Results: Interconnectedness with Nature

Participants were shown the Inclusion of Nature in Self scale (Schultz, 2002) and asked to select which one best displays how they view themselves in relation to nature

