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| **Title of Research Presentation** (Sentence case) Technobiophilia: The role of immersive virtual nature in the promotion of health and wellbeing and place identity |
| **Maximum 2500 characters (including spaces but excluding title)****Background**The biophilia hypothesis (Kellert and Wilson 1995) suggests human interaction with nature leads to positive mental wellbeing and stress reduction. When people report similar restorative health and wellbeing from interacting in virtual nature, Thomas (2013) terms this Technobiophilia. However, when people cannot access physical world nature due to disability, social isolation, or financial constraints immersive technologies, for example, online 3D avatar-based social virtual worlds (VWs), games, or virtual reality can give access to immersive scenes of virtual nature that mimic the visual, auditory, and spatial affordances of physical world nature; with similar positive health outcomes. However, this is an emerging field with few published studies. **Methods**Two studies in a 3D VW. 1. Interview study, 25 participants, 10 countries. 2. longitudinal multi methods case studies with 4 people, two focus groups, 14 people, 8 countries - aim how participation in VW communities influenced the ability to cope with long term conditions. Case studies methods interviews, social network analysis, diaries. Data collection: June 2011 – July 2015.**Results**In both studies, participants discussed how 24/7 access to immersive virtual nature reduced stress levels, pain, and increased their ability to cope and self-manage long term health conditions. For people with disabilities which placed constraints on control over their body in the physical world the ability via their avatar to walk, run, dance, through scenes of nature was liberating and joyful. Access to these scenes of nature where they could manipulate the weather (sun, rain, snow) and time of day, evoked memories and feelings of connecting with the ‘earth’ and ‘getting away’ from the stresses and strains of their health condition or physical world life similar to restorative health benefits of physical world nature.**Discussion**The findings from these studies support the use of, and increase our understanding of, how immersive virtual nature can promote health and wellbeing, place identity, and have similar health benefits as physical world nature. As immersive virtual technology becomes more mainstream, cheaper and accessible, there is enormous potential to give people access to virtual nature to improve public health outcomes. During this presentation the audience will be asked to take part in an interactive task around the theme of the presentation. **Keywords**Health equity, emerging technology, access to nature  |