

1. Title of the project

A phenomenological analysis of space and mood during the Corona pandemic

2. Coordinators

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3. Project summary

Since the start of the corona pandemic in 2020, restrictive measures to contain the spread of the virus have influenced the lives of people from all over the world. The consequences for university education and student life are well known. Lectures and classes have moved largely online and spaces and events where students usually gather to meet each other are closed or prohibited. This means irrevocably that students have very little ‘real life’, physical meetings with others. Their daily lives, like those of many others, are often limited to the space of their homes. For students this might mean limited to a room in a house with other students, back with their parents, or far away from family and friends in a new city one was supposed to build a life.

Research has shown that many students suffer from symptoms of stress, anxiety, and depression due to the corona restrictions (De Man et al., 2021; Husky et al., 2020; Sahu, 2020). These psychological studies state that loneliness, and lack of social interaction and physical touch are important triggers for disruptions of mood. In this project, however, we want to investigate how these disruptions of (wellbeing and) mood are related to the change or disruption of *spatiality* (due to the lockdown). Instead of a psychological approach that looks at causes and effects, we take a phenomenological approach. In phenomenology, lived space is understood as related to our lived body and our situation (Merleau-Ponty, 1945). Situational or lived spatiality thus refers to a home-like interaction with the world around us. Phenomenologists of health and illness have explained

how mood disorders, such as depression, may turn one's world into an un-homelike space (Aho, 2013; Fuchs, 2013; Svenaeus, 2013).

In contrast with these phenomenological studies, this study aims to explore how changes or disruptions in spatiality affect mood, instead of the other way around. Combining philosophical analysis and qualitative research, it will investigate whether and how university students' mood is changed by both physical spatial restrictions and the massive shift from physical space to digital space.

Central Research question:

How do changes of spatiality due to Corona restrictions affect university students' mood?

Sub-questions:

1. How to understand the relation between lived spatiality (both physical and digital) and mood? (philosophical analysis)
2. How do University students experience the change of spatiality due to the lockdown? (qualitative research: online open questionnaire, interviews)

(396 words)

4. Project timeline

This project will result in a co-authored paper (together with the supervisors) to be submitted to the journal *Health, Medicine and Philosophy*.

To this end, the trainee needs to perform the following tasks, in close collaboration with the three supervisors:

Literature review: Short review/summary of relevant literature on space restriction/ transformation due to Corona measurements and mood/wellbeing, to be used in the introduction of the paper. This review runs parallel with the other tasks (12 weeks).

Application ethical review board TSHD: before getting started with the actual research, the trainee needs to draft and submit this application in the first month of the project (4 weeks).

Philosophical analysis: In depth analysis of phenomenological literature on space and mood. This literature is already chosen by the supervisors. This philosophical analysis will be used for the construction of the theoretical frame of the qualitative research, as well as for the design of the open questionnaire and the interview guide (6 weeks).

Qualitative research: Design of an online questionnaire (MS Forms) with open questions; recruitment of 50 university students from Tilburg University (through social media) for the questionnaire; from this sample 5 students will be recruited for in-depth interviews. (10 weeks)

Analysis and writing: The collected data from the questionnaire and interviews will be analyzed in two steps: (1). open coding process (with the help of the software program Atlas.ti); (2). interpretation of these codes against the background of the philosophical theoretical frame. Together with the supervisors, the trainee will write a first draft of the findings (8 weeks).

Overview

Task	Month 1	Month 2	Month 3	Month 4
Literature review				
Philosophical/conceptual analysis spatiality/mood				
Drafting online questionnaire (open questions)				
Ethical Review Board application				
Recruiting respondents				
Online questionnaire (N=50)				
In depth interviews (N=5)				
Analyzing questionnaires/interviews				
Drafting paper				

References

- Aho, K. A. (2013). Depression and embodiment: Phenomenological reflections on motility, affectivity, and transcendence. *Medicine, Health Care and Philosophy*, 16(4), 751-759.
- De Man, J., Rens, E., Wouters, E., Van Den Broeck, K., Buffel, V., & Lorant, V. (2021). Het effect van de covid-19-lockdown op de mentale gezondheid van jongeren. *Neuron*, 26(1), 6-8.
- Fuchs, T. (2013). Depression, intercorporeality, and interaffectivity. *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 20(7-8), 219-238.

- Husky, M. M., Kovess-Masfety, V., & Swendsen, J. D. (2020). Stress and anxiety among university students in France during Covid-19 mandatory confinement. *Comprehensive Psychiatry, 102*, 152191.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (1945). *Phenomenology of perception* (Translation Donald A. Landes 2012). New York: Routledge.
- Sahu, P. (2020). Closure of universities due to coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19): impact on education and mental health of students and academic staff. *Cureus, 12*(4).
- Svenaesus, F. (2013). Depression and the Self: Bodily resonance and attuned being-in-the-world. *Journal of Consciousness Studies, 20*(7-8), 15-32.

5. Research trainee profile

A fruitfully accomplished research traineeship, especially when it can be completed with a publishable paper, may considerably help the candidate to successfully compete for a PhD grant, such as the NWO PhD in the Humanities grant. We therefore search a MA student with clear research ambitions.

We are looking for an enthusiastic MA student either in Health Humanities (with sufficient background in philosophy) or in Philosophy (with sufficient affinity with healthcare issues and qualitative research). The student has excellent communication and writing skills.