Bearing the discomfort: An autoethnography on Weltschmerz

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Abstract

Weltschmerz (*welt* 'world' + *schmerz* 'pain') is a German term with universal significance. It denotes a sense of pain, despondency and anger that comes from existing in the world as we know it. There has been little psychological research on Weltschmerz, yet with recent global events casting a light on human and ecological suffering, it seems that the concept might show us how to conceptualise distress in context. The Covid-19 pandemic provides a backdrop to this research and has become embedded in my interrogation and understanding of Weltschmerz.

The thesis is the product of an autoethnographic journey, which uses my subjectivity, conversations with community members, and cultural artefacts, to reflect socio-politicised locations of Weltschmerz. As Weltschmerz may be becoming on the intersection of self and culture/society, autoethnography provides the means to consider an "ethnographic wide-angle lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of …personal experience; then,… look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract, and resist cultural interpretations…" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p.739). The fluid and ambiguous boundary between myself and the world is examined to tussle with the complexity of where Weltschmerz may derive from, summoning Jungian knowledges around the collective unconscious and archetypes (1963; 1968b) and Kleinian object relations (1975a; 1975b).

My autoethnography champions a counselling psychology perspective that promotes the exploration of elusive affects, depth psychology, creative pursuit in research and practice (Douglas et al., 2016) and upholds community psychology principles that interrogate social justice, marginalisation, and ideological milieu (Douglas et al., 2016; Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010).

Implications for mainstream psychology's pathologising conceptualisation of distress are raised, with Weltschmerz positioned to encourage discourse which does not further medicalise mental health but recognises distress as a response to existing within a relational world. Counselling psychology practices are discussed to consider how to support clients, and practitioners (myself included), bear the discomfort of Weltschmerz.

Keywords: Weltschmerz; autoethnography; object-relations; collective unconscious; counselling psychology; community psychology; de-medicalised distress

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Chapter 1: Introduction and background

Weltschmerz

/ˈvɛltˌʃmɛːts/

noun

1. a feeling of melancholy and world-weariness.

When I first came across ‘Weltschmerz’ I had no idea what the term meant. Apart from a visit to Germany in secondary school, I have had minimal exposure to the German language and culture. Whilst completing my undergraduate degree in Psychology and Sociology, I often studied alongside a close friend. She was born and raised in East Germany and so when I came across Weltschmerz looking for a topic for my dissertation, she explained her understanding of how the term had developed and how it is used today. This was in 2016, a year that is remembered for the deaths of legends such as Prince and David Bowie, a year that heightened environmental concerns as the ‘hottest year on record’ (Change, 2023) to date, and a year of political upheaval with Republican Donald Trump winning the US presidential election and the UK voting to leave the European Union. I remember exactly where I was when I heard the news about ‘Brexit’.

Friday 24th June 2016

I stirred awake on the floor, my body uncomfortably sticky, clinging to the mat beneath me. The dense humid air made it a struggle to catch a decent breath, so I fumbled for the tent zipper. Emerging from the suffocating polyester shell, I was met with a blurry symphony of voices. Amongst the chatter, one voice cut through the haze: "We're out, mate, we're out!"

Amidst all the exhilarating chaos that is Glastonbury Festival and with my morning fog still lingering, I had momentarily forgotten that it was Brexit ‘results day’. The shock factor hit, followed quickly by disbelief, chased with a boiling indignation. See, I was staunchly in the ‘remain’ camp. I retreated into my tent to share the message, struggling to find the right words. Eventually, all that came out was a parroted: "We're out!"

> *As the message spread throughout the campsite people gathered, some engaging in passionate debates, while others sought solace in comforting one another. I couldn't quite pinpoint it, but it was as if we were collectively mourning a loss, grappling with an uncertainty that had engulfed us all.*

Finding out about 'Brexit' at Glastonbury Festival was a surreal experience. The 'communitas' (Turner, 2017) – the essence or soul of the Glastonbury community – was alive. Regardless of background, occupation or beliefs, societal structures were collapsed as people stepped outside of their day-to-day roles to be emersed in the festival. As these 'liminal people' (Turner, 2017) came together to bear the news of Brexit, I was struck by the sense of care for one another, and the deep despondency and disbelief that appeared prolific. The contrast between the celebration of the festival the night before and frustrations surrounding 'Brexit' seemed to magnify the disillusionment of the non-festival 'real' world. I joined my community of festival goers as we tried to make sense of what was unfolding 'out there', often struggling to find the words.

I now appreciate the first time that I found Weltschmerz as a light bulb moment, instants I would eventually begin to recognise as autoethnographic 'epiphanies' (Bochner & Ellis, 2016) - a shift in our perception of reality. I had found a word that captured how I often experience the world. A word that, on reflection, helped me understand the way I felt on that Friday morning at Glastonbury. Something other words had failed to do in the same way. I was left with questions, many of which remain unanswered. Is it a gap in the language - do I experience Weltschmerz but previously had not possessed the word to convey my experiences of it? Maybe I had not experienced Weltschmerz, or perhaps I was unable to experience a term that is born out of the historical and generational experiences of a particular culture? I have no lineage to Germany that I am aware of, and I do not speak German. I am not a member of the German culture, but I do consider myself an 'insider' in the study of Weltschmerz. How does this affect, for you, the legitimacy of what I am about to say?

My decision to research Weltschmerz intensified over the following years despite of, or maybe because, there doesn't appear to be an English word that captures the sense of pain, despondency, and anger evoked from existing in the world. In 2017, my fascination with Weltschmerz became the focus of my undergraduate dissertation. I explored Community Psychologists' understanding and experience of Weltschmerz (Ince, 2017). I found that

although there were similarities between Weltschmerz and familiar emotional experiences within a British context, like anger and hopelessness, Weltschmerz added to participants' sense making. Participants' experiences were brought together through common understandings of how Western socio-political forces may impact mental health. They also shared in the notion of how becoming more aware of the suffering that exists on a global scale, as well as the associated feelings of privileged guilt, may intensify feelings of Weltschmerz. This exploration ignited my desire to delve deeper into Weltschmerz, to more rigorously interrogate it through literature, theory, cultural artefacts and my own experience.

Four years later I have returned to researching Weltschmerz. When I started my training in counselling psychology, no one could have predicted the course of events that followed. The world was plummeted into an unprecedented state where fear, isolation and devastation coursed throughout the globe due to the Covid-19 pandemic, turbulent political landscapes, the climate crisis and further worldly events. This made researching Weltschmerz the equivalent of staring directly into the sun and required a research process that could enable me to navigate the balance between becoming immersed in the emotional intricacies of Weltschmerz and preserving scholarly rigor. Autoethnography has encouraged me to embrace the 'auto' (self) as a valid avenue for exploration of the 'ethno' (culture), expressed creatively through 'graphy' (writing) (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Ellis, 2004).

My thesis documents a profound (for me at least), deeply personal and relational exploration of my Weltschmerz, capturing the process of vulnerably baring/bearing my experience, and clothing it with critical literature, connecting me to culture. I hope that someone reading might be inspired to examine their own connections to Weltschmerz and remain curious about the associated discomfort of existing within a relational world. Autoethnographers suggest that 'what is made possible, or not, is not always welcome or easy. Surprise can be uncomfortable' (Wyatt, 2019, p.64). In relinquishing many of the binds of traditional qualitative research, I feel more able to embrace discomfort within the research process. I am inspired by Barbara Jago (2022) who didn't simply research depression, she researched with depression. Thus, my research isn't simply on this topic, it is in and through it. I agree that what autoethnography makes possible is uncomfortable, but it is within the discomfort and uncertainty that direction may be found (Ellis, 2004). This, I hope, will encourage further exploration of Weltschmerz within therapeutic settings and provide an additional perspective

for counselling psychologists, myself included, to draw on in service to our clients and ourselves.

Chapter 2: Literature review

The etymology of the word 'Weltschmerz' (*welt* 'world' and *schmerz* 'pain') originates in 19th century German Romantic literature (Beiser, 2016). Weltschmerz was coined by Jean Paul in the novel *Selina* (1827) and was used to convey the poet Lord Byron's deep sadness; reflective of a perceived personal inadequacy, as well as pain suffered from being in, and as a response to, the state of an inadequate world. More recently, in Psychiatric literature Weltschmerz has been considered a sense of existential pain derived from existing in the world (d'Aquili & Newberg, 2000) and more broadly it signifies world-weariness (Statt, 1998) which encapsulates an awareness of world suffering and failed expectations (Beiser, 2016). To contextualise the research, I will initially consider a deconstruction, as proposed by Derrida (1991), to look at the socio-historical context of Weltschmerz. I will then consider the interpersonal nature of Weltschmerz and the fundamental roles of intersubjectivity (Kuchuck, 2021), affect (Rogers, Schröder & Scheve, 2013; Seigworth & Gregg, 2010) and empathy (Klein, 1975a). Weltschmerz will then be considered from a Jungian (1968b) perspective and in relation to the collective unconscious, communicated through universal archetypes and symbols. Taking an outward perspective, I position the socio-political context and its consequences for Weltschmerz within a community psychology framework. This leads me to consider how Weltschmerz may be positioned as an alternative to medicalised categories of distress. Finally, global challenges that contextualise this research are examined.

Deconstructing Weltschmerz

In formulating 'deconstruction', Derrida (1991) tackled what he believed to be fundamental misconceptions surrounding language, how it works and even what words are. Derrida saw texts to have underlying and contradictory structures, which can be revealed when texts are read with this in mind. To deconstruct a text is to find the structural cracks embedded within its central concepts and prise them apart to expose the contradictions which make the text whole. Like all great philosophers, Derrida did little in the way of providing answers to the question 'how?'. He refused to entertain the idea that there may be a succinct definition of deconstruction, or a singular method imposed to go about the process of deconstruction. He did, however, point to several key *ideas* – reluctant to consider them *concepts* of deconstruction (Sim, 1999) – which I will discuss in relation to Weltschmerz below. Derrida coined the term '*différance*' – a play on the French word *différence* which means both

‘difference’ and ‘deferral’ - to highlight the temporality and instability of meaning behind language. *Différance* refers to how signifiers only attain their meaning in relation to other signifiers (Sim, 1999). For example, Derrida (1997) argued that Western thought often depends upon *binary oppositions*, such as speech/writing or good/bad and so creates linguistic hierarchies. This can lead to one term being privileged over the other or understood in relation to its counterpart. According to Derrida (1997), to deconstruct a term and understand the full extent of its meaning both the *synchronic meaning* – how the word exists within a linguistic system, in a specific time and in relation to other terms – and the *diachronic meaning* - the historical meanings of a term – must be considered. Following Derrida’s suggestion to gain a better understanding of how discourse and systemic structures can be interrogated to consider the role they play in the experience of Weltschmerz; I will discuss both the synchronic and diachronic meanings I associate with Weltschmerz. I also note the irony of dividing the next section into two ‘opposing’ positions.

Diachronic meaning of Weltschmerz

Weltschmerz was coined in an era characterised by a 'Pessimism Controversy’ (Beiser, 2016). It initially denoted a privileged 'coming of age,' but with a derogatory slant, suggesting an over sensitivity to the world's evil and suffering (Beiser, 2016). However, by the late 1860s, the term took on a more ‘serious’ representation of the German public's state of mind, particularly leading up to the Second World War (Beiser, 2016). The popularity of Weltschmerz is evident from its increased use in English texts after the world wars, as indicated by the Google Books Ngram Viewer (2019), which tracks phrases across different text corpora. Notably, there was also a significant spike in its usage in German literature during the 1980s, a decade marked by widespread public health anxiety due to the AIDS epidemic (Haus, 2016) and concerns about environmental issues like acid rain and deforestation (Forestry Commission, 1984). This suggests that language can leave *traces*, remnants of ideas that can be tracked through history and culture, as Derrida (1997) noted.

The evolving concept of Weltschmerz reflects a shift in worldview influenced by changing understandings of evil and suffering, especially in a 'post-Christian' era where questions about the value and meaning of existence itself became more prominent (Shapshay, 2018). Despite

these changes, pessimism may persist, manifesting differently depending on the dominant worldview. Considering recent global events, such as the climate emergency and the Covid-19 pandemic, it will be interesting to revisit Google Books Ngram Viewer when it is next updated to see how the *trace* of Weltschmerz may have continued.

Synchronic meaning of Weltschmerz

Weltschmerz is a compound word made up of the words 'welt' (world) and 'schmerz' (pain). 'Welt' is derived from the Proto-German 'weraldiz', another compound word meaning 'man' (weraz) and 'age' (aldiz), roughly translated to 'the age of man'. 'Schmerz' is cognate with the term 'smart' and Old Higher German 'smerzan' meaning 'to pain' or 'to bite' ("Weltschmerz | Search Online Etymology Dictionary," 2023). German and English, amongst other European sister languages, share Proto-Indo-European roots. As contemporary languages developed, words have often been *borrowed* between languages as people moved around or countries were invaded or 'conquered' (Benítez-Burraco, 2018). Translation of words may have been unnecessary or impossible when no obvious alternative already existed in the adopting language. Similarly, I suggest that there is not an English alternative that captures Weltschmerz and so I am not looking to translate the term to consider 'world-pain', rather I am arguing to borrow Weltschmerz from the German language and expand our use of it in English.

You may have noticed that I do not italicise Weltschmerz in my writing, although this is the academic tradition when using words from another language or words that aren't often used within the 'dominant' culture (Barokka, 2020). This is a choice, one made to 'normalise' the use of Weltschmerz in a way that does not encourage a hierarchy of words (Derrida, 1997), especially when so many words within the English language are borrowed from other languages yet we are specific about the words we choose to make italic (see Barokka's, 2020, short article on decolonialising and de-italicizing 'foreign' words). Derrida warns us of the Western tendency to use binary oppositions and so in considering the '*différance*' (Sim, 1999) of Weltschmerz I am careful not to provide an alternative perspective of 'world pleasure'. This may assume a 'transcendental signified' (Derrida, 1997) -suggesting a fixed meaning of a sign or word - which places pleasure above pain as an authority. Rather, I will consider Weltschmerz as a single term, and concept.

The theory of Linguistic Relativity, also referred to as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis (Whorf, 1956), also highlights how words do not have fixed meanings and proposes that language influences the way we think. The specific language(s) we speak, along with their grammatical structure, influences the way we perceive the world around us. For example, some languages have several words for different shades of colours whilst another language may have just one word to describe a whole spectrum of colours. Those with the language to describe more shades of colours may be more aware and attentive to colours than those who do not, influencing the way they engage with the world. In support of this, linguistic evidence has focused on the conceptual contents, such as the impact of language on visual perception (Lupyan et al., 2020) and the effect of language on linguistic coding systems that create a ladder of senses (Majid et al., 2018). This suggests that language is the device that helps to shape our interpretation of the world. Therefore, introducing Weltschmerz further to those who may not already have awareness of the term may allow for new interpretations. Additionally, situating Weltschmerz within counselling psychology literature and the words we use to describe distress may be influenced by modalities. For example, this may be the difference in understanding Weltschmerz as being routed in my thoughts and beliefs, in line with a Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) orientation (Skinner & Wrycraft, 2014), or conceptualising Weltschmerz as a psychoanalytic signifier within the 'symbolic order' (Lacan, 1999). This highlights how people and practitioners may utilise their personal experience and knowledge to better understand Weltschmerz.

It's all (inter)subjective

Subjectivity is my own conscious, and unconscious, perspective on my experience of reality (Kuchuck, 2021). In this sense, the shape that my Weltschmerz may take is created by, and limited to, the boundary of what I am able to be exposed to in the world. I am not alone in this process, rather my subjectivity is constantly colliding with others. There are numerous definitions of intersubjectivity (see Benjamin, 1988; Ogden, 1994; Stolorow, Atwood & Orange, 2002; Winnicott, 1960) which inform Kuchuck (2021) in capturing a broad yet concise description; 'the collision, interaction, intersection, interpenetration, and general, reciprocal impact of two subjectivities' (p.26). Intersubjectivity argues that we are fundamentally interwoven in relationship and our individuality is only secondary (de Quincey, 2005). In other

words, our psyches are developed in relation to other psyches and the intrapsychic processes we can analyse within ourselves reflect those between us and other people. Subjectivity subsequently only exists within and because of intersubjectivity (Mitchell, 2002). Weltschmerz was coined to express resistance against infringements on an individual's subjectivity and personal freedoms by others and was associated with a sense of despair arising from the destructive realities of the world or inequalities that lead to interpersonal suffering (Paul, 1827). Therefore, Weltschmerz appears to require the presence of others and being in some sort of relationship with an 'other' to be fully experienced.

A relational way of thinking can be understood through the works of Hegel (cf. *Phenomenology of Spirit*, translated by Miller & Findlay, 1977). Hegel's perspective suggests that the Self is not a fixed entity but a dynamic process in constant becoming through its relationship with the Other. The Other represents another subjectivity, and through this relationship, both the Self and the Other are constituted. This process involves mutual recognition. For instance, while working closely with colleagues and engaging in autoethnography, I contributed my ideas while also listening and learning from others. This collaborative process resulted in a cohesive whole driven by a shared desire to fill the gap in mainstream psychology for a space that honours (inter)subjectivity and its interconnectedness with culture.

Since Weltschmerz arguably requires the involvement of others to be experienced, expanding subjectivity to encompass what is initially perceived as different or other may offer insights into my ability to experience Weltschmerz. However, this realization may be limited to my conscious awareness, as psychoanalytic theory suggests that the self is composed of forces beyond our acknowledgment (Lacan, 2019), blurring the line between me as 'subject' and world. Consequently, I may not be fully aware of the extent of my experience of Weltschmerz or the underlying forces shaping it. Equally, my clients may not be fully aware of their own experiences of Weltschmerz when our subjectivities entangle.

Ogden (1994) argues that "there is no such thing as the analysand apart from the analyst, and no such thing as an analyst apart from the relationship with the analysand" (Ogden, 1994, p.4). Ogden is referring to the collision of two subjectivities within the therapy session and goes a step further to introduce 'another'; the 'intersubjective analytic third', an entity comprising feelings, sensations, and musings derived from the impact of the therapeutic

relationship. This third entity provides the analyst with insights into unconscious processes between the client and therapist (Kuchuck, 2021; Ogden, 2004). Intersubjectivity underscores communication through emotions and a transpersonal sharing of meaning that goes beyond language. Although language often serves as the medium of interaction, non-verbal communication, such as body language, significantly contributes to the shared experience of being in the moment. Thus, intersubjectivity suggests that feeling precedes language (de Quincey, 2005).

Considering this perspective, Weltschmerz may be experienced between individuals even without relying solely on language. The interwoven nature of Weltschmerz may reflect a desire for connection, which is based on intersubjectivity and contributes to making the experience of Weltschmerz more bearable. Throughout my analysis, the intersubjective composition of Weltschmerz will be drawn upon and more explicitly delved into within Chapter 6 where two subjectivities collide in a discussion on Weltschmerz.

Public affect and Weltschmerz

Affect shapes our perceptions and interactions, reminding us that we are in constant communication with the world - a give and take relationship that is enduring and transformative. A relationship where once again 'feeling precedes language' (de Quincey, 2005) and words become a vessel to attempt to capture elusive affects. The complexity of affect makes it resistant to a succinct definition and so rather than attempt a lengthy explanation I will offer a snippet from Seigworth and Gregg's (2010) introduction to affect from their book *The Affect Theory Reader:*

> "Affect, at its most anthropomorphic, is the name we give to those forces-visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally *other than* conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion-that can serve to drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension, that can likewise suspend us (as if in neutral) across a barely registering accretion of force-relations, or that can even leave us overwhelmed by the world's apparent intractability. Indeed, affect is persistent proof of a body's never less than ongoing immersion in and among the world's obstinacies and rhythms, its refusals as much as its invitations" (p.1).

The concept of 'affect' provides a framework that considers more than just the 'emotional contours' of Weltschmerz (Ince, 2017). It also encourages the interrogation of the interplay

between emotions, physiological and behavioural responses as well as how these may be interpretated within social and cultural contexts (Seigworth & Gregg, 2010). The social and cultural components of emotion have long been recognised yet there are discrepancies in *how* these contexts guide and regulate emotion (Rogers, Schröder & Scheve, 2013). Rogers, Schröder and Scheve (2013) propose that 'if we take seriously the claim that the social is indeed *constitutive* of emotion, then we cannot fully understand emotion without (a) adequate conceptualizations of the social at the levels of interactions, relationships, and cultural meanings, and (b) an adequate understanding of the mechanisms that link social and individual aspects of emotion" (p.124). To account for these components of emotion they put forward 'affect control theory' (as also discussed by Heise, 1979, 2007; MacKinnon, 1994; Smith-Lovin & Heise, 1988).

Affect control theory proposes that social events are interpreted through shared linguistic categories accessible to those within a particular culture, that understanding is derived from affective meanings, and that motivation to preserve these meanings persists throughout an interaction (Heise, 1979, 2007; MacKinnon, 1994; Smith-Lovin & Heise, 1988; Rogers, Schröder & Scheve, 2013). Emotion is often derived from an individual's identity, restricted by language and social institutions (MacKinnon & Heise, 2010; Rogers, Schröder & Scheve, 2013). To further this, affect control theory persists that collective experience is understood and preserved through shared semantic structures that subsequently construct the mind of the individual and reflect the 'symbolic order of societies' (Rogers, Schröder & Scheve, 2013, p.125). Therefore, language plays a vital role in how we can access meaning collectively ascribed to affects on a cultural level. This suggests that those who are aware of the term Weltschmerz may have more immediate/less defended access to embodied, felt, and processed affective understanding of Weltschmerz.

The role of empathy in Weltschmerz

Empathy enables affective sharing, where we can accurately recognise the emotional state of another and then also experience a second-hand reaction of the same emotion in response (Morrison et al., 2016). This enables us to experience affective resonance with others, which helps us to imagine and understand their subjective experience and gain insight on their

feelings and needs. Empathy appears to come naturally to many and tends to be a default response to observing the suffering of others (McAuliffe et al., 2019).

A developmental perspective on empathy may deepen my exploration of Weltschmerz. Melanie Klein (1882-1960), a primary figure in developing object relations theory, described a normal developmental trajectory to include two nonlinear positions (1975a). The paranoid-schizoid position is how an infant manages deprivations and anxieties of the first three months and is characterised by splitting what is perceived as 'good' and 'bad' to organise experience. The depressive position is where the infant begins to experience inner and outer realties more accurately and enables the integration of internal and external objects. Achievement of the depressive position enables the ability to experience the absence of good as a loss, rather than an added attack of the bad, and develop capacity for grieving (Klein, 1975a). The spectrum between the positions involves associated attitudes through which events may be interpreted. At the paranoid-schizoid end experiences of empathy may be considered more opportunistic and more inflexible in understanding another person. Instances of empathy at the depressive end may be more open to discovery of a variety of experiences within another (Richmond, 2004). This may suggest that those who have a greater propensity towards the depressive position may be more susceptible to experiencing the empathy necessary to feel Weltschmerz.

Underpinning the development of empathy is the protective intrapsychic process of projective identification (Klein, 1975a). Projective identification involves an intolerable personal characteristic being projected into someone else who then assumes the projected behavioural qualities as their own. The metaphor 'putting oneself in another's shoes' is said to convey this link between projective identification and empathy (Hinshelwood, 1991). An embodying of another's perspective to better understanding their affect. This process feels central to my experience of Weltschmerz for two reasons. Firstly, I am curious to consider whether I project my feelings of disillusionment, despondency, or despair about the world onto external factors such as cultural objects, institutions, or even particular individuals to perhaps experience emotional 'containment' (Bion, 1962). Secondly, I am equally as keen to consider the opposite – whether I identify with the projection of others suffering and/or imperfections I perceive to bolster a feeling of being part of a larger collective experience.

Weltschmerz in the collective unconscious

There is something enchanting about old libraries, where words are bound between pages just waiting to be picked up and brought to life through the mind and voice of another – interconnecting people across time. I find the library to be a useful metaphor for Carl Jung's (1875-1961), the Swiss founder of analytic psychology, concept of the collective unconscious (Jung, 1968b). Picture yourself wandering between shelves adorned with hand carved wooden finishings, shelves brimming with books in every subject and in every language. Each book containing stories that transcend individual experience for they do not have a singular author, rather they have been crafted by the imagination and collective wisdom of humanity. You don't need a library card to visit here, you have unrestricted access 24/7. Running your finger across the dusty spins of books, you stop on one that captures your attention. You open the book but before you get a chance to start reading, its characters leap from the pages. A wise old sage with long flowing white hair imparts wisdom, a caring mother wraps her arms around you in a warm embrace whilst she shares 'old wives' tales' and in the corner of your eye you notice a sneering shadow darting for the safety of a dark corner. As these ancient archetypes fill the air with their voices you notice they become more interlaced, finishing each other's sentences as they seep into each other's stories.

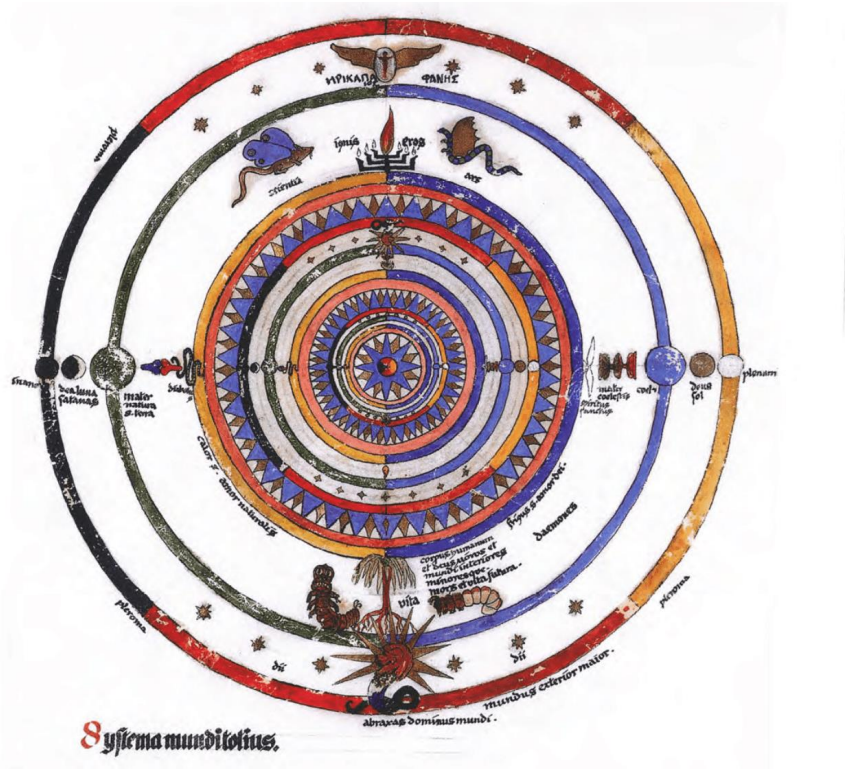
Jung (1968b) proposed that we have 'identical psychic structures common to all' that, much like old stories, are passed down through generations and influence the way all of mankind experiences the world. Jung (1968b) named these structures 'archetypes' which are housed within the 'collective unconscious'. Archetypes are proposed to be the original bases of ideas and represent patterns of human development devised from psychological, interpersonal and the relationship between the psyche and the world (Pascal, 2009). The collective unconscious may be considered a repository for the cross generational stories of human suffering and dissatisfaction with the imperfections of the world. A collective pool of emotions and experiences that contribute to the commonality of Weltschmerz across universal themes of humanity. This experience may be described as 'synchronous', where unconscious archetypal visions relate to external events (Jung, 1991; Cambray, 2009). Synchronicity may demand new paradigms for understanding its value, including its relevance to large-scale events impacting individuals, cultures, and the world (Cambray, 2009). Weltschmerz may be positioned as a synchronous experience in response to global, and more local, events.

The nature of archetypes is transcendental and phylogenetical, in that archetypal images and themes are alike across the world regardless of culture. This can be seen in literature, particularly fairy tales and myths, where the content and underlying messages remain similar regardless of location of conception (Adamski, 2011). Joseph Campbell (1949), Mythologist and writer, argued that myths are not fiction but rather representations of fundamental experiences of mankind and universal truths which can be examined to guide individuals, often through process of trials, transformation and self-realisation. Kalsched (1996) draws upon the *Eros and Psyche tale* to "show how the personified imagery of the self-care system appears in mythological material" (p.6), with Eros cast as the hero who rescues Psyche – the innocent and traumatised ego. He believes that trauma disturbs archetypal patterns which can lead to an individual feeling disconnected from wider narratives that help to bring meaning and guidance in life. It is through integrating mythopoetic forces that we may enter into discussion with existential questions surrounding the meaning of life and embrace a sentiment put forward by Campbell: "The message of the Buddha is simple but profound: we are to seek joyful participation in the suffering of the world" (2003, p.125). This provides an alternative perspective to consider my research, one where Weltschmerz may be recognised in mythopoetic images and the associated suffering may be embraced, rather than pushed away.

Mythopoetic images can act as a gateway to the numinous. Jung (1963) described the numinous as an experience which is 'inexpressible, mysterious, terrifying, directly experienced and pertaining only to the divinity' (p.416). The Self is often understood as a psychic ordering, a wholeness, or a unifying centre of opposites, as depicted in mandalas. The Self is associated with positive elements of the numinous which manifest in various symbols of divinity that may be identified in the experiences of mankind (Kalsched, 1996). Kalsched also highlights "that many troubled people are positively addicted to the positive, light giving side of numinous experience (and equally terrified of the numinous' dark aspect)" (p. 208), which may lead to the numinous being used defensively and depicted symbolically as daimons. Reflecting on the numinous allows for connections to be made between Weltschmerz and something bigger; my experience of Weltschmerz may not reside entirely within me or anyone for that matter. It encourages consideration of a transcendent or spiritual aspect of Weltschmerz.

Jung embraced transcendental images through his studies of alchemy, realising alchemists used symbolic language akin to the modern periodic table to convey profound insights about the human soul. Their work involved physical materials and imagination. The gold they sought was not ordinary gold but *aurum philosophicum* - a philosophical gold with deeper significance (Jung, 1963; Marlan, 2021). Jung spent decades deciphering alchemical symbolism and identified key concepts related to psychic dynamics. The *prima materia* – the primary substance of the universe - represented the raw unconscious. Through the alchemical process of *opus alchymicum,* thought to be a metaphor for the process of psychic transmutation, Jung saw the substance being transformed. Jung interpreted base metal transmutation into gold as the psychophysical transmutation within an individual from impurity to clarity. To Jung, this was analogous to the process of 'individuation' - the route to discover the possession of one's own 'whole' self. This involves two movements, firstly, identification with an unconscious image to bring them into awareness and then detaching from the image to gain an individual perspective on it (Stein, 1998). Wholeness often made an appearance in Jung's alchemical images in the form of mandalas. Whilst flicking through a translation of *The Red Book* (Jung, 2009), I came across Appendix A which is displayed below as Figure 1. It is the first, and perhaps one of the most significant, mandalas created by Jung, in 1916, and later published anonymously in 1955 in *Du* dedicated to the Eranos conferences.

Figure 1. *Jung's Systema Munditotius (1955)*



In 1995 Jung wrote to Walter Corti, Swiss philosopher, with the following analysis of the Systema Munditotius:

> *"It portrays the antinomies of the microcosm within the macrocosmic world and its antinomies. At the very top, the figure of the young boy in the winged egg, called Erikapaios or Phanes and thus reminiscent as a spiritual figure of the Orphic Gods. His dark antithesis in the depths is here designated as Abraxas. He represents the dominus mundi, the lord of the physical world, and is a world-creator of an ambivalent nature. Sprouting from him we see the tree of life, labelled vita ('life') while its upper counterpart is a light-tree in the form of a seven-branched candelabra labelled ignis ('fire') and Eros ('love'). Its light points to the spiritual world of the divine child. Art and science also belong to this spiritual realm, the first represented as a winged serpent and the second as a winged mouse (as hole-digging activity!). The candelabra is based on the principle of the spiritual number three (twice-three flames with one large flame in the middle), while the lower world of Abraxas is characterized by five, the number of natural man (the twice-five rays of his star). The accompanying animals of the natural world are a devilish monster and a larva. This signifies death and rebirth. A further division of the mandala is horizontal. To the left we see a circle indicating the body or the blood, and from it rears the serpent, which winds itself around the phallus, as the generative principle. The serpent is dark and light, signifying the dark realm of the earth, the moon, and the void (therefore called Satanas). The light realm of the rick fullness lies to the right, where from the bright circle [cold, or the love of God] the dove of the Holy*

> *Ghost takes wing, and wisdom (Sophia) pours from a double beaker to left and right. This feminine sphere is that of heaven. The large sphere characterized by zigzag lines or rays represents an inner sun; within this sphere the macrocosm is repeated, but with the upper and lower regions reversed as in a mirror. These repetitions should be conceived of as endless in number, growing even smaller until the innermost core, the actual microcosm, is reached"* (Jung, 2009, p. 364).

In this single example, Jung elegantly interweaves science and art to symbolically show the contradictions and connections within the Self and between the Self and the world. Perhaps Jung should be considered an autoethnographer. My experience of Weltschmerz may be brimming with inner conflicts and the psycho-social process demonstrated by Jung in creating the above mandala. For example, transmutation may represent my desire for personal and societal transformation that is embedded within my Weltschmerz, whereas the reconciliation of opposites, may represent the lightness and darkness or spirit and matter that reside within my Weltschmerz.

Community psychology and Weltschmerz

The psycho-social processes that I feel may be embedded within my Weltschmerz may be explored from a community psychology perspective, which focuses on understanding and promoting the well-being of individuals within the context of their communities. Community psychology has been developed with the following in mind; a preventative outlook to human struggles, group dynamics and systems theory, the need for action-based research, the influence of social change movements and a desire to tackle concerns rooted in the social. These developments led to novel conceptual frameworks, including an emphasis to understand barriers to social justice, community empowerment, ecological considerations, and appreciation of human diversity. With a focus on systemic issues, community psychology is concerned with global and local political agendas that shape the wellbeing of communities and individuals and maintains a commitment to address injustice within these contexts (Kloos et al., 2020).

I discovered community psychology through attending a BPS Community Psychology Section event in Bristol. I was immediately taken by the talks that emphasised how inequalities in mental health are often rooted in social or systemic factors, integrating conversations I recognised from my Sociology minor. This newfound passion went on to inform my

undergraduate dissertation where I explored community psychologists' understanding and experience of Weltschmerz (Ince, 2017). Their experiences were brought together through a shared understanding of how Western socio-political ideas, particularly neoliberalism and austerity measures, may impact mental health. Additionally, I found that becoming more aware of the suffering that exists on a global scale, as well as the associated feelings of privileged guilt, intensified feelings of Weltschmerz.

In 2017 I helped to co-ordinate the 3rd Community Psychology Festival, which was held in the Arnolfini, a community focused art house, perched on Bristol harbourside. I held a workshop to facilitate discussions around Weltschmerz at the Festival. The 'dark studio', where my session took place, was brimming with bodies. This certainly didn't help my anxieties surrounding public speaking, but now I can appreciate why the topic of Weltschmerz attracted so many people. There was an almost unanimous view in the room that day, that Weltschmerz had the potential to add to the discussion of mental health in the UK. This fuelled my desire to study Weltschmerz and continued my interest in community psychology. In line with a community psychology perspective, to understand my experience of Weltschmerz I will consider the development of the current socio-political climate below before going on to discuss examples of systemic sites of power and resulting marginalisation. I will further reflect on these areas and the influence on my experience of Weltschmerz within my analysis and discussion.

Socio-political context of Weltschmerz

Whilst globalisation has enabled a more interconnected world, fuelling the development of global governance after World War II, the crevasse in equalities has also grown within and between nations. The unrealised promises of globalisation have extended an opportunity for the rise of isolationist and right-wing politics (Gostin et al., 2020). This was suggested to be the case when the Republican Party won the 2016 American Presidential election, where those who felt excluded from the American Dream, and thus the national community and imagined prosperity, were proposed to have swung the vote (Fitzduff, 2017). Similarly, the referendum that initiated the departure of the UK from the European Union (Brexit) exemplified an upsurge of right-wing isolationist sentiment and a sense of longing for an imagined UK that is deemed better than the status quo. At the same time, others may have

experienced an increase in disillusionment with the rise of right-wing populism (Jones & O'Donnell, 2017). For example, it is hard to ignore the role of xenophobia in Trump's election; the references made to divide the USA and Mexico and attempts to prevent Muslims from entering the United States. Likewise, 'othering' may have been a significant factor in Brexit as well as the rise of the Alternative party in Germany who oppose Muslim refugees (Macgregor-Bowles & Bowles, 2017).

Recognising the emphasis placed on psycho-political concepts of mental health (Angelique et al., 2013) and how, at a meso level of analysis, highly valuing competitive individualism, and asymmetrical power relations, may increase psychological damage (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010). The impact of neoliberalism on mental health has been well documented (e.g., Beattie, 2019; Roberts, 2020; Teghtsoonian, 2009), with Cosgrove and Karter (2018) suggesting that neoliberalism is best understood as an 'attitude' which shapes subjectivity and how knowledge is developed. As neoliberal policies emphasise the responsibility of self-concerned agents, there is concurrently an increase in surveillance to reinforce such behaviour (Cosgrove & Karter, 2018). Therefore, both right and left political persuasions may be said to have experienced the pessimistic worldview synonymous with Weltschmerz. This also suggests that multiple levels of analysis, interwoven within the exploration of Weltschmerz, will be necessary to interrogate the different lines of inquiry which potentially scaffold the affective concept.

Today's global political climate may speak to systemic sites of power and how they are experienced across micro and macro levels of society. Social marginalisation may be experienced in response to actions taken by those in power. For example, "whole societies can be marginalized at the global level while classes and communities can be marginalized from the dominant social order" (Kagan & Burton, 2005, p.294). At a community level, the public momentum gained by the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020 highlights the inequality and discrepancies faced by black communities. The movement has been used as a platform to further conversations about black dehumanisation, historical oppression and more specifically "health disparities, mass incarceration and aggressive policing, intergenerational racial trauma, restorative justice, and antiracist work" (Watson, Turner & Hines, 2020, p.1). I am not black and cannot assume the experience of any black community. From my perspective, I observe the social injustice that these community members continue

to experience, and it is the process of *witnessing* marginalisation that may attribute to my Weltschmerz.

Whilst I may bear witness to others' marginalisation and often consequential suffering, I also *experience* firsthand some elements of social marginalisation associated with being part of the LGBTIQA+ community. There is a wealth of literature that demonstrates sexual minority specific stigma as linked to poor mental health outcomes (e.g., Hatzenbuehler, 2009; Herek, Gillis & Cogan, 2009; Pachankis & Bränström, 2018), as well as the detrimental impact of political rhetoric - such as that during the 2016 US Presidential election - on sexual and gender minority stigma (Veldhuis et al., 2018). For sexual minority people, the process of undergoing minority stress is said to operate differently between ethnicities and high and low socioeconomic statuses (Shangani et al., 2019), suggesting that the amount of 'minority' labels someone wears may compound the stigma they experience. This line of thought will encourage me to wrestle with my identity and how it interlocks with my Weltschmerz as well as considering that *witnessing* and *experiencing* abuse of power and social marginalisation is constitutive of my Weltschmerz.

De-medicalising distress

Alfred Adler, one of the pioneers of psychoanalysis and perhaps the first Community Psychologist, proposed that community feeling is society's ultimate goal and that contextualising community members is vital in understanding individual wellbeing (Fadul, 2014). Adler saw individuals who follow a 'destructive path' and seek to exploit others as lacking social interest (Ryckman, 2012). The underlying teleology of Adlerian theory, the goal of perfection in an ideal global community, bears within it the notion that all that endures is the product of this social feeling (Fadul, 2014). Building upon my undergraduate dissertation findings on the emotional contours of Weltschmerz (Ince, 2017), this study aims to look at both the content (what Weltschmerz is) and functional role (what Weltschmerz does). Ehrenreich et al., (2007) argue that understanding both content and function of emotion enables people to become more aware of their emotional experiences. They also emphasise that the situational context in which an emotion is elicited, including ways they are triggered by distal events and misattributions of emotions, is vital in promoting appropriate application of emotional responses in therapy. Thus, this thesis will inquire into this social feeling,

highlighting Weltschmerz as a possible response to the world not attaining such perfection. Moreover, I am showing my struggle to find a way to describe my response to the world's imperfections, as I would define 'perfection', and although belonging to the field of counselling psychology I land on a concept that is yet to be fully recognised by the field.

In the UK, the British Psychological Society is the professional body for counselling psychology, whose Practice Guidelines (British Psychological Society, 2017) promote social justice, inclusivity and individual rights and dignity. Counselling psychology is also regulated by the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) whose Standards of Proficiency for Practitioner Psychologists similarly promote the understanding of and action towards cultural, social, and individual factors that contribute to mental health difficulties. Counselling psychology has humanistic and existential-phenomenological roots (Kuchuck, 2021) as it values understanding and working with the unique experiences and perspectives of an individual. This may be seen as a shift away from the dominant medical model of mental health which focuses on diagnosis and treatment of symptoms, captured in each revision of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

The DSM (2022) describes mental disorders as 'syndromes' that are underpinned by 'dysfunction' in a person's biology, psychology or process of development that are categorised by disturbances in the way a person thinks, feels, or behaves. The emphasis is put on something going wrong within the person and relies on a general description of this 'thing' to account for the 'mental illness' (Douglas, 2010). CBT is somewhat aligned with the medical model of mental health due to a key tenet of CBT being to reduce suffering via symptom reduction, implying a psycho-biological understanding of distress (Guy et al., 2019). This is strongly reinforced by the NICE guidelines (NICE, 2022) that position CBT to be the 'gold standard' treatment for many instances of psychological distress; alongside treatment that often involves medication, such as antidepressants.

With a growing number of Counselling Psychologists working in the NHS, there is an expectation for them to practice CBT due to its perceived ability to deliver measurable treatment outcomes (David et al., 2018). As such, counselling psychology may be colluding with the medicalisation of distress by reinforcing practices that support a medical model of mental health. However, being required to practice within certain therapeutic modalities doesn't necessarily reflect the practitioner's view or the way in which the modality may be

applied practically. For instance, from my experience, regardless of setting Counselling Psychologists often look to avoid the term 'illness' as it implies a preconceived notion that something is broken and requires a 'fix' whilst ignoring the suffering of the individual within a "modern society that makes sanity a precarious state for many people" (Moncrieff et al., 2011, p. 257). I believe many Counselling Psychologists recognised that it is often through interactions with mental health professionals that everyday human responses to a hostile and cruel world are separated from their meaning in a way that exacerbates harm (Moncrieff et al., 2011), and look to counteract this.

Within the UK counselling psychology field, there is a growing movement to de-medicalise our understanding and approach to mental health that shifts focus from pathologizing to normalising everyday concerns. This movement has been driven in part by counselling psychology's recognition that descriptions of what characterise 'mental illnesses', as delineated by the numerous revisions of the DSM, do change quite substantially over time. "Depression for example, can only be categorised as a 'mood disorder' when underpinned by a culturally sanctioned construct of affectivity" (Douglas, 2010, p. 25). We only need to look at Freud's work on melancholia to see how the field has developed since the 19th century and as such concerns like depression may be best understood as complex psychosocial relationships that are impeded by the reductionist nature of diagnoses (Douglas, 2010).

Individuals with mental health concerns are often not assigned an equal societal value as those without (Rössler, 2016). The medicalization of mental health can further this stigmatization and limit individual's ability and desire to engage with daily activities. For example, approximately 2/3 of people with concerns about their mental health studied expected some form of discrimination when applying for work or when seeking a significant relationship (Rössler, 2016; Thornicroft et al., 2009). Counselling psychology looks to tackle this concern by providing a holistic approach to mental health that considers factors such as social and cultural context, environmental influences, and encourages a focus on individual strengths and resiliencies (Douglas et al., 2016). This approach emphasizes the importance of understanding the underlying and interlocking drivers of mental health concerns, rather than simply treating symptoms. As a Counselling Psychologist I align myself with practices that look to de-pathologize distress and as such will offer Weltschmerz as an alternative perspective to consider individual reactions to an often arbitrarily cruel and hostile world.

Global challenges - the context of the current research

Although the impact may not be fully realised for years to come, there is no escaping the effects of Covid that are already visible. At a macro level, the global economy is experiencing dramatic shifts and countries are implementing major structural renovations which subsequently affect communities (Gupta et al., 2022). It has become apparent that black communities have been hit harder by the pandemic due to socio-economic disparities (Monte & Perez-Lopez, 2021; Vasquez, 2020). At an individual level, the pandemic has been likened to a mental health crisis with a wealth of literature (see Cullen, Gulati & Kelly, 2020; Dong & Bouey, 2020; Pfefferbaum & North, 2020; Talevi et al., 2020; Usher, Durkin & Bhullar, 2020; Vigo et al*.,* 2020). Research has also been conducted on the impact of the pandemic dovetailing with a mental health crisis (see Brooks et al., 2020; Özdin & Özdin, 2020; Petzold et al., 2020; Shevlin et al., 2020; Vindegaard & Benros, 2020). For example, the impact of quarantine has been reviewed; findings include confusion, anger and concerns related to post-traumatic stress, as well as an increase in depression rates (Brooks et al., 2020). Perhaps unsurprisingly, an increase in health anxiety, particular virus anxiety, has been documented with positive associations being found between health anxiety and cyberchondria – the exacerbation of health anxiety through internet searches for medical information (Jungmann & Witthöft, 2020).

The Covid-19 pandemic provides a significant backdrop to my research. The British Psychological Society (2020) released a guidance document surrounding *the impact of Covid-19 on the wellbeing of psychologists* which identifies key areas such as personal anxiety and uncertainty, adjusting to changeable and remote working, potential ethical and moral dilemmas and the impact on training and research. As a trainee during the pandemic, I have been impacted across all these areas with my training, practice and research all being affected. I have written and re-written aspects of this thesis (i.e., literature review, analytic chapters, implications) during lockdowns and varying waves of the pandemic. The pandemic provides context for the research as well as content within my story of Weltschmerz.

Climate change has been on the global agenda for years, with warning that if large scale changes aren't made soon then the ramification of the climate crisis will lead to increased environmental disasters and ultimately risk human life through events, such as a lack of food

due to damaged crops (Forster et al., 2023). However, climate action in response to intergovernmental guidance has been critically delayed. In contrast, the Covid-19 pandemic initiated swift and decisive changes in policy, public discourse and measures that dramatically altered civil liberties. This is perhaps due to the meanings people place on the spread of the virus as well as its proximity to them, making the pandemic feel more immediate (Hochachka, 2020). Boltanski's (1999) *Distant Suffering* may elucidate this process of transformative change by considering the two predominant positions faced by those witnessing the suffering of others. 'Local particularism' focuses on those who suffer in the immediate environment and 'abstract universalism' expands the perspective to enable awareness and identification with those that suffer on a global scale. This may suggest that the pandemic provided a vessel for global issues to be felt at a local particularism level, where they are no longer considered estranged.

The media plays an integral role in bringing global events into our homes by disseminating powerful articles and images of human suffering (Boltanski, 1999). In recent years there has been a focus on the consumption of international pandemic narratives and the development of a more global perspective on worldly events. The power of the media can create multicultural solidarity and generate support for governmental agenda, such as the NHS 'hands, face, space' campaign (Department of Health & Social Care, 2020). However, the media may also spread an implied level of responsibility on the observer of suffering (Nash, 2008). Together with the proliferation of fear caused by the pandemic, nationalism may be enhanced as a protective strategy (Bieber, 2020) and subsequently challenge a truly abstract universalism position. A humanitarian view which encompasses an abstract universalism perspective (Boltanski, 1999), and potentially the process that connect the two positions, may help to explain how my Weltschmerz is elicited.

Rationale for the study

I propose that by introducing Weltschmerz to the research endeavour fresh insights may be gleaned on how and why we experience distress. Insights that resist pathologizing what it may mean to exist in a relational and often hostile world. I aim to wrestle with my own experiences of Weltschmerz and reflect on my yearning for connection to make it more bearable. In alignment with "the ethos and philosophy of humanistic psychology, of an empathic

engagement with the client, the importance of the helping relationship and a concern with health rather than pathology" (Douglas et al., 2016, p.6), this autoethnographic research aims to peel back layers of affect, narrative, and intersubjectivity surrounding my experience of Weltschmerz. Through this exploration, I seek to encourage further study of Weltschmerz within therapeutic settings and offer an additional perspective for Counselling Psychologists, to draw on in service to clients and themselves. This autoethnographic approach aligns with counselling psychology's key values of working compassionately and creatively (Division of Counselling Psychology, BPS, 2023), to understand human experiences and emotions. It emphasizes self-reflection, introspection, and the power of stories to offer insights into personal experiences within cultural and social contexts. By embracing autoethnography, my existing knowledge and interest in the subject serve as both the rationale for conducting this research (Muncey, 2005) and the tools with which to explore and refine my understanding of Weltschmerz (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). This process allows for a deeper exploration of the intricacies of Weltschmerz and its implications for counselling psychology practice.

Chapter 3: Methodology

My initial research design

I feel as though I have been on a journey of research design. Where my research has ended up is a far cry from where it began. Yet, the deliberation of each step – even changing my design completely – has not been in vain. The process has widened my understanding of research, theoretical positionings and analytic tools. I have shared my process as it unfolded below, in the hope that rather than the information being misleading or superfluous, a better understanding of the decisions I have made along the way, and how they have impacted my autoethnography, may be gained.

I began designing my research by considering my ontological position – what I believe constitutes reality and the nature of being (Ponterotto, 2005; Lundh, 2017) – and my epistemological stance – what I believe to be the nature of knowledge and how we can access it (Cardinal, Jones & Hayward, 2004; Greco & Sosa, 2017). Ontological and epistemological reflexivity are considered core skills for psychotherapists as the assumptions we make about being human, the world we live in and the meaning we attribute to experience shape the way we work in both research and practice (Negri et al., 2019; Willig, 2019). I discerned that my onto-epistemological commitments may be best described in the following way:

"Mainstream qualitative research in psychology" (Hadjiosif, 2022)

Qualitative researchers, broadly speaking, suggest that numerous versions of knowledge and reality exist, and often try to understand people in context and the ways in which they make sense of the world. A rich descriptive account can be investigated, alongside interpretations, as qualitative research emphasises epistemological reflexivity (Willig, 2008).

Social constructionist

Our identity originates from the social realm and is internalised via socialisation and the process of mediation. Language is what ultimately makes thoughts possible and provides a means of structuring our experiences of the world. Thus, social constructionism reads texts as multi-layered and having unintended consequences regarding the reproduction of power-knowledge relations (Burr, 1995; 2015). With that in mind, I treat the object of my inquiry,

Weltschmerz, as having a discursive dimension, although the extent to which I can attend to this is limited given that the word doesn't even exist within the English language.

Post-qualitative

In what some in the social sciences are referring to as the 'ontological (re)turn', post-qualitative research highlights the ontological juxtaposition between 'conventional humanist qualitative methodology' (St.Pierre, 2014, p.2) and 'post' theories, such as post-structuralism or postmodernism. St.Pierre (2014) argues that although the 'posts' were developed as critiques to conventional humanist approaches, much contemporary research still imitates lines of inquiry where assumptions are based on Enlightenment Humanism. St.Pierre (2014, p.3) provides an example "…it's not clear to me how one would use Foucault's (1971/1972) archaeology in a qualitative interview study given that he wrote throughout *The Archaeology Of Knowledge* and the *Discourse on Knowledge* that he was not interested in the 'speaking subject.'" Therefore, using Foucault's archaeology to deconstruct material gained from speaking subjects within an interview may be considered duplicitous. Acknowledging such collocation may encourage the writings of 'post' theorists to be used in new, possibly more authentic, ways. For example, whilst I have gained further insight into my experience of Weltschmerz through speaking with cultural members, I have dissolved the speaking/writing hierarchy by not following 'standardised' research methods such as transcribing interviews and performing some sort of analysis that centralises the words of others.

New materialism

New materialism (which may fall under the wider post-qualitative umbrella) focuses social research on what Deleuze and Guattari (2004) refer to as the 'assemblage', which comprises heterogeneous components that belong to orders of existence that are often considered discrete. The unity of these components comes exclusively from them working as a whole, affecting one another in complex ways, to produce something. This line of thought infers that the material world is not separate from the social world, thus matter and meaning are not separate and cannot be understood independently from each other. Given the current state of the global climate crisis, which has been reported to impact individuals on both a systemic and individual level (Pihkala, 2018), I argue that the world-pain that Weltschmerz signifies is, at least in part, produced by the physical pain of the world and as such requires a line of

enquiry that attends to both the material assemblages, as well as the social constructions that feed into the concept.

Looking back, when I designed the study, I was grappling with the complexity of Weltschmerz and difficulty in researching social constructions of a concept that doesn't exist in the language or culture in which the research is taking place. What I was actually doing, was embarking on a *sensemaking encounter* – the retrospective process by which people attribute or rationalise meaning to experiences (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005). In this case, when people in one culture encounter a cultural concept from another culture and try to incorporate it into their existing knowledge and experience of the world. I knew my research design wasn't achieving what it needed to, yet I felt stuck and needed guidance to find a new direction.

A warm day in July

I made my way down to Bristol's harbourside, smiling to myself as Spotify selected to play The Lovin' Spoonful's Summer in the City (Sebastian, Sebastian & Boone, 1966) through my headphones. Although the temperature was not "hotter than a match head" it seemed fitting. Ever since the first Covid-19 UK lockdown the Bristol harbourside had felt almost eerily quiet. Miltos, my supervisor, was waiting for me under a white sail-like canopy covering the tables beneath. We ordered coffee, a love we share, and began to discuss how the academic year had been. The conversation turned to research and my progression viva, where (world) pain had been both the topic and our sense of the meeting. Miltos broached the idea of autoethnography, an idea I had previously dismissed in an attempt to see through my jigsaw research design. "Creative" was a word that stuck out to me. From the inception of my research, I had always imagined it to include creativity, whether that was in the form of data that was collected, the way my analysis was presented or something which represents my research as a whole. I began to feel enthusiastic about the proposition of change.

I value creativity. I am quite severely dyslexic, and I was never particularly 'academic' growing up. I was often in the lowest sets at school; reading aloud in class would bring me out in cold sweats, and I was the last person in my class to graduate from using a pencil to a red tubed 'handwriting' pen. In year six, when I was 10 or 11 years old, I was given a creative writing

activity based on the 1980/90's children's educational BBC Look and Read production 'Through the Dragon's Eye' (Russell & Russell, 1989) – a story of 3 school children entering a magical kingdom through a mural they had painted on a playground wall. I was told to 'just try', a sentiment I was often encouraged to adopt in school. I was struck by how easy I found it to imagine the story I was telling, every miniscule detail taking shape and coming to life in my mind. My teacher pulled the paper from under my pen, read a few lines and gasped. I will always remember the sound of that gasp. The surprise that the dyslexic girl could write in a creative way, albeit plagued with spelling and grammatical errors.

Although not something I took up in any serious fashion, creative writing did at one time become an outlet for me. It was never a surprise to me that I could write creatively. What was a surprise, was that somewhere along my journey I had abandoned it, driven by academic insecurities to land firmly in over- intellectualising, which you could see in my writing style. It took me a while to realise that my original research design was an expression of intellectualisation, an academic defence erected to give my study, and myself, more value. Writing this down gives me a sinking feeling in my chest. When did I become someone who values intellectual ideas or ideals over the feeling or experience of something? – not that they are necessarily independent of each other. That conversation with Miltos inspired me and over the following months I reconnected with the essence of 'sensemaking', the therapeutic nature of free writing and the aim of my research.

Return to the methodological rabbit warren

I began to read around autoethnographies and reconsider my onto-epistemological positioning with a sensemaking encounter in mind. The position that initially stood out to me was phenomenology. "Phenomenology is a philosophical approach to the study of experience" (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p. 11) and is interested in understanding what it is like to be human and what constitutes our lived experience of the world. This seemed particularly applicable to autoethnographies which emphasise the 'auto' and exploration of one's own psychology. Phenomenology enables a researcher to explore their own experience of a particular phenomenon with enough depth that one may identify *essential qualities* of the experience, qualities that may then transcend the research situation to also speak to others' experiences too (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009).

This seemed ideal for studying a sensemaking encounter with an abstract concept like Weltschmerz, where I could identify some essential elements through my own lived experience and present them in a form that others can relate to. I dived deeper into the literature which naturally led me to Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA); a form of analysis which comes gift-wrapped in its phenomenological and hermeneutic (the theory of interpretation) theoretical positioning, as well as a structured predefined method (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). Some researchers have recently adopted an IPA informed autoethnographic approach, for example, with studies focusing on incarcerated men in equine-facilitated psychotherapy (Penalva, 2021), embodiment of cultural diversity (Zhang, Gindidis & Southcott, 2020) and experience of LGBTQ older adults during the AIDS epidemic in San Francisco (Morgan & Rubio, 2019) to name a few. I breathed a sigh of relief as I considered my quest for methodological and philosophical footing may have come to an end; however, the relief was fleeting as I began to consider what it would mean for my research if I adopted IPA. Although IPA would have enabled a rigorous and in-depth exploration of how people make sense of Weltschmerz, exploring the experience of the concept in its own terms (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009), I felt as though the focus would have potentially shifted. The theoretical underpinning would have led the research towards descriptions of the structures of the experience (Moustakas, 1990) of Weltschmerz, which alone would have been valuable to explore. However, I believe the intrigue, personal significance, and creative discovery promised by an autoethnographic approach (Ellis & Bochner, 2000) would be compromised in the adoption of such a well-established theoretical framework. Ironically, in all my want and search for structure I decided against IPA due to it being too structured and moving away from the essence of what I believe empowers the autoethnographic position – a discussion I will return to.

I wondered whether I was starting in the wrong place. Perhaps consideration of my method of analysis may be useful as a starting point; one I could effectively work backwards from. Drawing on my past research experience, I considered using thematic analysis (TA) to identify themes across multiple data sources. The beauty of TA is its theoretical flexibility that can be moulded to the needs of the research and, as long as the researcher's position is effectively attended to and justified, it can be used in combination with a variety of different theories (Braun & Clarke, 2013). This got me thinking; although I had moved away from IPA as a

method I was still enthralled by phenomenology as an underpinning for autoethnographies. Could it be that I could draw upon the theoretical versatility of TA and combine it with a phenomenological approach? The answer would prove somewhat complicated. Reading around the qualitative research literature I came across papers (such as Ho, Chiang & Leung, 2017; Sundler et al., 2019) which found ways to utilise TA from a phenomenological perspective. A reflexive TA specifically, such as that put forward by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2013), may also be the key to underpinning TA with phenomenology. However, I struggled to grasp how the philosophical underpinning of phenomenology, including related theories of interpretation, are surmountable with TA when it identifies patterns of meaning across data. Whilst I am sure that it is possible to rectify this conundrum, this positioning was not helping *me* to make sense of Weltschmerz.

Autoethnography

> *My foot slips on the wet moss blanketing the fallen log I have just scurried over to take a short cut. A short cut that has ended up taking me the long way round. I am so absorbed in the map in my hand that I have barely noticed the scratches along my arms from the bramble bush I have just wrestled with. Nor am I paying attention to my heart that is threatening to pound out of my chest. I am in the full clutch of adrenaline, racing against the clock, against myself. The next 'control' (the orange and white flags I am searching for in the forest) appears to be on the other side of the thicket. There are no paths, no obvious landmarks that I can tell. I need to take a bearing. I look to my wrist, expecting to find my compass dangling from its red thread. It's not there. A sudden surge of panic courses through my veins as I rapidly check my non -existent pockets. It's gone.*

The feeling of being lost is a feeling I am somewhat used to. I spent many Sunday mornings growing up being 'dragged' to orientating events with my dad, an avid and seasoned orienteerer. Although admittedly the aim of orienteering is to not get lost but successfully find your way between controls as quickly as possible, there have been many times that I found myself within woodlands unsure on which direction to follow. Autoethnography elicits a similar feeling of uncertainty; it is a nonlinear process that requires openness and flexibility

to really feel the topic being studied and then step backwards and examine the murkiness of the emotion-topic interplay (Ellis, 2004). Autoethnography is like being sent "into the woods without a compass" (Ellis, 2004, p.120) to get a lay of the land before finding your bearing.

Autoethnography is a research method that draws upon the self and personal experience (auto) to analyse and interpret (graphy) cultural phenomena (ethno) (Adams, Jones & Ellis, 2014; Adams, Ellis & Jones, 2017; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Personal experience is inextricably enmeshed with cultural and political norms. The autoethnographer engages in rigorous reflexivity to interrogate this entanglement and where the self and social intersect (Adams, Ellis & Jones, 2017; Muncey, 2005; Méndez, 2013). The depth of self-reflection employed by the researcher enables meticulous exploration of complex social phenomena, a level of understanding which is difficult to capture in conventional styles of research (Adams, Jones & Ellis, 2014), especially ones that rely on recruitment of participants for interviews and interpretation of those interviews. This criticism of traditional research practices often highlights how the researcher's own perspectives inform and shape research processes, what the research amounts to and the creation of culture itself (Adams, Ellis & Jones, 2017).

There is not a singular definition or process of what an autoethnography is and how one may be done (Wall, 2006). Additionally, there are approaches which may be considered autoethnographic research which have not adopted the autoethnography title such as, personal narratives (Bochner & Ellis, 1992; Bond, 2002) and evocative narratives (Bochner & Ellis, 2016; Méndez, 2013). In much the same way as it may be suggested that there are as many forms of therapy as there are individual therapists, the nature of using the self so prominently within the research process suggests that each autoethnography is unique (Wall, 2006). Therefore, throughout the remainder of this chapter I will draw upon material which helped me to make sense of what autoethnography is and how I will use the method to explore Weltschmerz.

My theoretical commitments with autoethnography

After exploring the literature that may fall under the post-qualitative umbrella (e.g. Deleuze & Guattari, 2004; Lather & St.Pierre, 2013; St.Pierre, 2014) a point that struck me was how creativity in our approach as researchers is considered essential to break conventional

dualisms, for example expert/participant and internal/external, often found in qualitative research (Fox & Alldred, 2014). This is echoed within autoethnography; which goes beyond postmodernism – that often aims to erase the objective/subjective binary – to collapse the observer and subject divide so that the storyteller is also the tale (Anderson, 2006; Schmid, 2019). As qualitative researchers and counselling psychologists we encourage the use of self, self-reflection, and creativity in our practice – evident by the emphasis placed on reflective practice in the British Psychological Society Practice Guidelines (British Psychological Society, 2017) which also accentuate the use of professional artistry. Autoethnography embraces reflexivity and places it at the centre of analysis (Adams, Ellis & Jones, 2017). As this facilitates self-awareness, it may be considered another teaching tool that encourages taken for granted assumptions and the connection between the relational and cultural to be theorised (Ellis & Bochner, 2006; Hoppes, 2014; Schmid, 2019), extending the practice of counselling psychology itself. Whilst some criticise autoethnography for centralising the researcher's voice (Sparkes, 2020), the autoethnographer is recognising that they are inevitably entrenched within culture(s) and to try to detach from this reality to seek an elusive 'objectivity' is potentially more objectifying to participants than it is understanding (Schmid, 2019). Therefore, the constructivism paradigm, which highlights how individuals actively construct their own notions of reality through cognition, leading to the coexistence of multiple realities (Shannon-Baker, 2023), is well fitting for an autoethnography.

A post-qualitative, constructivist approach enables exploration of the meaning making processes of Weltschmerz that autoethnography creatively collects and writes to. Whilst the phenomenological component further supports centralising experiences of Weltschmerz and provides a theoretical justification for drawing so heavily on my own personal experiences in combination with that of others. Therefore, the foundational aim of autoethnography aligns well with my two levels of inquiry; to explore the meaning making processes and experiences of Weltschmerz. Further, I will forgo the traditional practice of preconceiving a research question to allow for an expansive intellectual and affective exploration of the concept of Weltschmerz.

The power of stories

The way Carolyn Ellis and Arthur Bochner (2000), often considered the pioneers of autoethnography (Wall, 2006), begin their renowned chapter *Autoethnography, personal narrative, reflexivity* is a lesson in how to lead by example. They *show* whilst they *tell* what it is to do autoethnography. It was on reading this chapter and the conversation between Ellis from her office and Bochner at home (with musings of what types of dogs they have) that I started to get a feel for autoethnography. Within the first few pages I felt as if I knew something of Ellis and Bochner (2000), their hopes and fears about writing the chapter, the proposition of academic rigor, and what that meant for how they may be able to communicate about autoethnography itself. Ellis and Bochner (2000, p.739) propose;

> *"Autoethnography is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural…Usually written in first-person voice… texts, concrete action, dialogue, emotion, embodiment, spirituality, and self-consciousness are featured, appearing as relational and institutional stories affected by history, social structure, and culture, which themselves are dialectically revealed through action, feeling, thought, and language."*

This highlights the way the researcher's use of self is a conduit to understanding complex cultural phenomena and how autoethnographies prioritise value-based stories derived from experience over theories developed in a vacuum (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Méndez, 2013). This is a key strength of autoethnographies, their ability to be relatable and resonate with their audience, igniting personal reflection in those reading the researcher's stories and potentially developing their connection with and understanding of the topic of discussion through their own epiphanies (Adams, Jones & Ellis, 2014; Bochner & Ellis, 2016).

Autoethnography creates a research framework that enables self-discoveries to be translated into an academic output, unashamedly fusing the personal with the professional (Schmid, 2019). At the heart of autoethnography is the aim to show "people in the process of figuring out what to do, how to live, and the meaning of their struggles" (Bochner & Ellis, 2006, p. 111). This is reminiscent of the practice of counselling psychology and what we may encounter when working with clients – someone who is potentially trying to make sense of their struggles. This autoethnography is exploring how I make sense of my own struggle with Weltschmerz. Notably, autoethnography is not just a form of creative writing – a criticism

often attributed to the method [see Ellis (2009) for a dynamic autoethnographic response to such critiques] - but is academically rigorous and provides interpretations that are justifiable and supported by other data sources that can triangulate the researcher's opinions (Wall, 2006). Autoethnography enables me to speak with other people about their experiences of how they make sense of Weltschmerz, as well as considering secondary data sources, to broaden my understanding of my own experience.

Autoethnography connects identity and culture, the individual with the social, contextualising the topic of research and connecting with potentially *hidden* stories (Ferdinand, 2009; Schmid, 2019). Therefore, autoethnography contains a political persuasion that influences societal change (Holman-Jones, 2005). As Weltschmerz may be becoming within the intersection of self and culture/ society, autoethnography provides the means to consider the "ethnographic wide-angle lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of …personal experience; then,… look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract, and resist cultural interpretations…" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p.739). Autoethnography cultivates critical assessment of sociocultural contexts and consciously looks to revolutionise the distribution of power that is evident within preconceived norms (Grant, Short & Turner, 2013; Schmid, 2019). Critical Autoethnography embraces Foucauldian theories of fluid and shifting power (Power, 2011) and deconstructs distorted perceptions of stagnant power and subjectivities via interrogating privilege, oppression and dominant discourses present within personal narratives (Chang, 2014; Schmid, 2019). Therefore, by assuming an autoethnographic approach I am consciously employing my own unique voice to my personal, temporally and contextually located, standpoint to unsettle potentially oppressed or subordinate stereotypical views of mental health by offering my experience of Weltschmerz as an additional perspective to be considered.

'Data' collection

My use of self

Unlike many traditional methods of research, I have used myself – including my own memories and experiences – as the key participant. Moustakas (1990) suggests that it is possible to develop a highly valuable autoethnographic heuristic inquiry with a single

participant. Whilst I have also spoken with other cultural members, our shared conversations have been distilled through my subjectivity, influencing what I have chosen to include in my autoethnography. This includes my personal feelings, views, and opinions. For example, I believe in left wing politics and my political persuasion can be clearly seen, and perhaps even felt, within my analysis where I do not attempt to hide or avoid my 'biases', rather I embrace them as part of my narrative which intersects with the training and experience, I have gained within Counselling Psychology and academia (Poerwandari, 2021). This is also seen through my attendance of the annual Division of Counselling Psychology Conference 2022 which became a source of inspiration that directly informed Chapter 7. I further my use of self as I draw upon my affective embodied self, the relationship between psyche (mind) and soma (body) often being an overlooked sources of information in psychotherapy (Young, 2006). For me, this has meant acknowledging my physical ailments and the interconnection I perceive them to have with my research process and experience of Weltschmerz. At times this has involved divulging intimately personal details about my body, myself and relationships, and I have done so willingly and after serious consideration of what I feel comfortable to share with the world in my pursuit to better understand Weltschmerz. My hope is that others reading my story, told evocatively to elicit affect and engage the reader beyond a surface courtesy reading, may resonate with a particular element and draw their own connections to Weltschmerz (Adams, Jones & Ellis, 2014; Bochner & Ellis, 2016).

Cultural artefacts

What may constitute 'data' within autoethnography varies greatly. 'Data' may include subjective experiences in the form of memories and creative expressions in the form of diaries or drawings for example, to sources derived from others such as cultural artefacts in the form of photographs, music, or conversations (Bochner & Ellis, 2002; Robinson & Clardy, 2010). When I began my autoethnography research process I spent time reflecting on cultural artefacts that I had previously encountered that elicited a sense of Weltschmerz in me. For example, this included online articles I had read, pieces of art I had seen in museums, songs I had grown up listening to and also many conversations I had been a part of throughout my life and during my undergraduate research on Weltschmerz.

My fluid and complex exploration and discovery of autoethnography (Edwards, 2021) led me to ask the question 'what would I do if I was presented with the term Weltschmerz for the first time?'. My answer to this question, perhaps revealing me as a product of my generation, was to 'Goggle it'. I went through the first 10 pages of results, categorising them into online articles, songs, films, radio, poetry, and art. I've wondered about my felt need to 'categorise' these results and it is likely that I was looking for some sort of organisation or order within a concept that is elusive and abstract. I did find a feeling of satisfaction amongst the colour coded tabs of the extensive OneNote document I created but this was somewhat short lived. The breadth of information helped to shape my developing view on Weltschmerz and indicated the need to gain depth in my exploration. This aligns with an autoethnographic approach which empathises the use of pre-existing data, including those which may be considered more creative or art-based work (Bochner & Ellis, 2016; Hughes & Pennington, 2017; Moustakas, 1990) and creative expressions created by the primary researcher themselves to generate alternative reflexive understandings of self (Douglas, 2014; Sparkes, 2020). For me, depth was found in the reflective process of free writing and drawing to generate and connect with my own different perspectives of Weltschmerz and the sense making process.

It was through this initial internet search that I came across *The Guardian's* 'the week around the world in 20 pictures' series (The Guardian, 2023). The use of photographs as cultural artefacts is an effective autoethnographic tool (Bochner & Ellis, 2002; Robinson & Clardy, 2010). The saying 'a picture is worth a thousand words' had never rung so true for me. In all I was attempting to capture in my reflections I could see in vivid colour. My search for order continued as I systematically went through each week of the images since March 2020, when the Covid-19 pandemic took hold in the UK, up until March 2022. Whilst the progression of the pandemic was captured throughout the globe, I chose to omit any images that depicted it. Rather, I aimed to gather images and create a timeline of just some of the events from around the world that coincided with the pandemic. The images I have chosen are based on what I recall from this time period or what stood out to me when revisiting The Guardian website. Admittedly, I did make a conscious decision when choosing between photos to opt for the image that depicted a different location to what I may have previously included to avoid overrepresenting a territory. I don't believe this to be the case or at least there isn't

scope within this thesis to begin a cross culture comparison of Weltschmerz. Alongside the timeline of images from around the world, I have included a dialogue about the pandemic to capture key milestones as it progressed in the UK. This dialogue is again based on my memories and supplemented with governmental information and online news sites.

Conversations with a purpose

Changing my research design had ramifications for the role of others within my research. Initially, I was planning on conducting narrative interviews (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000) that would be transcribed (following convention outlined by Malson, 1998) and interrogated through narrative analysis (Esin, Fathi & Squire, 2014). Participants were selected purposely based on a self-identified interest in worldly events. Inclusion criteria included basic conversational fluency in English and a self-assessed capacity to take part. Given that the study is 'becoming' at the intersection of community and counselling psychology, it would have been unethical to further pathologise and exclude individuals with current experience of distress. As such, the following steps were taken to select participants:

1) Interested parties contact researcher via email

2) Clear participant information sheet (Appendix A) and consent form (Appendix B) distributed via email to all interested in taking part.

3) Telephone conversation with interested parties who meet inclusion criteria to ensure suitability with ongoing support from supervisor.

4) Interviews arranged with selected participants.

Initially, recruitment was planned to be conducted via posters (Appendix C) displayed in local cafés and businesses, with the potential for snowballing, to encourage community members to be involved. However, due to the Covid-19 pandemic and necessary social distancing measures, recruitment begun online. To attempt to capture the same community feeling as recruiting via local cafés, 55 Bristol wards and Bristol postcode Facebook groups were identified and contacted. Originally, interviews were expected to take place within cafés located in the centre of Bristol with the aim to cut across the researcher situation/community divide, enabling a community psychology orientation to the research (Nelson & Prilleltensky,

2010). However, due to social distancing it was necessary for interviews to take place online via Microsoft Teams.

I conducted three online interviews where points of analytic interest began to be identified and were further reflected upon to inform my autoethnography. It is worth noting that one participant speaks German as their first language, has been aware of Weltschmerz since childhood, and has lived in the UK for over a decade. I include this information because I was struck by how there were similar threads that ran throughout all participants stories of Weltschmerz, regardless of the amount of previous exposure they had to the concept of Weltschmerz.

Points of analytic interest included systemic injustices and political awareness with examples provided by all participants that intertwined media consumption to increase their perceived experiences of Weltschmerz. Historical and cultural contexts were highlighted in participants understandings of Weltschmerz where, as a child, all three participants were aware of worldly events that included suffering of others, with two out of the three sharing early traumatic experiences of directly witnessing others' physical and emotional suffering. The thread of 'cautionary tales' became a key narrative alley that captures personal experiences of pain and suffering which reflected a wider cultural concern, such as sexual harassment and a perceived link to the 'Me Too' campaign (me too, Movement., 2023). Such tales also cautioned against the fight for justice, with Weltschmerz being a consequence, with cultural figures being drawn upon for examples, such as a Turkish Sociologist who spoke with young girls subjected to abuse and who completed suicide leaving a note which translated to 'there's too much pain'. Weltschmerz was positioned as a response to the intolerable nature of witnessing suffering and the perceived powerlessness to impact change, seeing neglect, low socio-economic mobility, and circumstances of disadvantaged others. Recognisable stories were also embedded within participants stories, such as George Orwell's 1984, and experiences of vivid dreams about the world ending with 'something insidious' creeping out to destroy the world – like in the book, a dark under belly.

With the change in methodology and transitioning to an autoethnography, I no longer aimed to capture interview data in this 'traditional' sense. Rather, I absorbed the previous conversations into my reflections and engaged in further informal "conversation with a purpose" (Burgess, 1984, p.102), to deepen my own understandings of Weltschmerz. This

approach utilised spontaneous generation of questions, that sit within a naturally unfolding conversational structure (Moustakas, 1990; Patton, 1980). An informal conversation is argued by Moustakas (1990) to be the most consistent with the heuristic sense making exploration and is the most effective at encouraging evocative expression to be disclosed. Researcher self-disclosure is also suggested to stimulate conversations (Jourard, 1968; Moustakas, 1990) and I found discussing my own experiences of Weltschmerz to be important springboards for developing and deepening conversations with others. As these conversations are not directly used in my analysis, further consideration of inclusion criteria was not required as the stories shared are interwoven with my own and implicitly offered in analysis in the form of my reflections connected to culture.

Surveying an audience

I jointly presented a symposium at the Division of Counselling Psychology Annual Conference (DCoP) on autoethnography and my research. I requested all those in attendance to complete a short two question survey to inform my reflections and analysis chapters;

1) Have you ever experienced Weltschmerz? (Binary answer – yes or no)

2) Are there any other words or short phrases that you might use to describe this feeling/experience? (Open box response with an answer of 50 characters max).

No demographic information was collected and as such participants remained entirely anonymous.

Responses from the survey were collected via Qualtrics, disseminated by a QR code at the conference. An introductory page on Qualtrics very briefly outlined the purpose of the survey and signposted participants to relevant sources of support if required. There was no explanation of 'Weltschmerz' included as the aim was to engage those familiar with the term or those intrigued enough to search for the term. The completion time of the survey was 3 minutes or less. Enough familiarity with the English language was assumed in the target population and no inclusion or exclusion criteria was stipulated. Autoethnographic research rests on a post-qualitative epistemology, which rejects ontological and empirical claims – thus I have not used the data to express percentages (i.e. x% of people feel Weltschmerz) but rather to stimulate my own reflexive exploration of the concept. This was made clear in the

brief introductory page on Qualtrics. I aimed to capture whether a wider group of individuals have experienced Weltschmerz and how they may describe this experience in the English language. The breadth of this data aimed to complement the depth of qualitative research and was used to represent the data visually in a word cloud (see page 81).

Ethical considerations

Ethical approval for this study has been granted by the University of the West of England, Faculty Research Ethics Committee (FREC), UWE research ethics reference number: HAS.20.06.191 (see Appendix D). An amendment to ethical consideration was gained to survey attendees at the conference (see Appendix E). A risk assessment was carried out and is held by the Faculty Health and Safety Repository (ref R4488). I also gained approval from the conference organisers and the DCoP committee of the British Psychological Society (BPS). No demographic information was gathered, and all participants remained entirely anonymous. It was not possible to withdraw one's answer from the survey as participants were not able to be identified.

Unlike many traditional research methods, autoethnography can be undertaken retrospectively. This means that an autoethnographer may decide to engage in autoethnography after the events or stories described have taken place. As relational beings, every encounter we have influences and shapes our experience. Inevitably, those encounters will be drawn upon to subsequently shape an autoethnography (Edwards, 2021). From an ethical perspective this raises interesting questions surrounding when, or even if, participant consent is sought when included in reflective stories. Even when individuals' identifiable information is anonymised, it is still possible for someone to recognise themselves within a story (Edwards, 2021). This may even be a sign of a well written autoethnography. This may, in part, come down to the use of language and how stories, including their characters, are portrayed (Wood & Liebenberg, 2019) regardless of the content of the stories. A key consideration is that within these reflective stories autoethnographers are writing about themselves and their perspectives within interactions when a particular phenomenon or experience occurred (Edwards, 2021). Therefore, the aim of reflective stories in autoethnographies may be argued as geared towards producing an account that is authentic

and acceptable to the autoethnographer's own conscience (Lee, 2018). I will ensure to effectively anonymise identifiable information throughout my autoethnography and will only include as much reference to others as I deem necessary.

Due to stories surrounding Weltschmerz being likely to include potentially upsetting material, in addition to UWE ethical procedures and British Psychological Society ethical guidelines for human research (British Psychological Society, 2014), the use of my therapeutic skills will help ensure that any conversations about Weltschmerz I enter are contained. The introspective nature of autoethnography requires researcher emotional wellbeing and distress to be considered (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Exploring difficult memories and experiences in an authentic manner may evoke unexpected emotional responses in me that may lead to rumination (Edwards, 2021). Existing control measures include an understanding of the topic and that the research will be conducted under supervision. I will also have access to support services and attend regular personal therapy where I can process my observations and affective response to the ongoing research.

Chapter 4: Introduction to Analysis

Autoethnography involves co-creation, whether that is through the active process of seeking out conversations on a topic or through watching films or reading poetry written by another, which lends itself well to the discussion of Weltschmerz which sits at the intersection between personal/internal and social. As part of the messy process of 'becoming' (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004) at the place where self meets culture - a psycho-social space that is not captured by either word; only signalled tantalisingly by the hyphen in between. A space that psychology has mistaken for a carefully controlled laboratory or something that can be measured on a questionnaire. I aim to show rather than just tell my process of how I am attempting to make sense of the experience of Weltschmerz (Bochner & Ellis, 2006).

In my first chapter of analysis, I sink deep into my own experience of Weltschmerz as I consider being *in a world of pain* within the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. I create a timeline using photographs from The Guardian's 'the week around the world in 20 pictures' to capture just some of the worldly events that coincided with the developing pandemic between March 2020 and February 2022. Alongside the images is a bimonthly narrative that captures my experience of how the pandemic developed within the UK. I address the building tension between distance and proximity to Weltschmerz, as I begin to experience Weltschmerz increasingly seeping in.

Chapter 6 involves an 'analysis' in conversation, not to be confused with conversation analysis (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1974), between myself and my Director of Studies, Miltos. We have been returning to the discussion of Weltschmerz for the past six years. Many of our musings have helped shape the way I have come to think of Weltschmerz and so this is captured in the rawest state, from the inception of the idea on the telephone to the emails sent back and forth, accompanied by an analytic discussion that intertwines psychological literature and theory to elucidate some of the underlying threads I pulled throughout *a conversation*.

I presented this conversation at the Division of Counselling Psychology annual conference 2022 (Hadjiosif, Ince & Martin, 2022), which proved to be another fruitful experience that informed my developing understanding of Weltschmerz. In Chapter 7: *a shift in perspective: the conference*, I embrace the more performative elements of autoethnography (Wyatt,

2019) to invite the reader to attend the conference through the eyes of a fictional Counselling Psychologist, Thomas. We follow Thomas as he arrives at the venue and later attends our symposium on autoethnography where he is asked to complete a short survey on Weltschmerz. Just to be clear, the survey was real whereas Thomas is not. The answers to the survey are presented visually in a word cloud and discussed, alongside an innocent but telling typo of the title of my talk which appeared in the conference programme. In Chapter 8, my final chapter of analysis, I once again fused fiction and reality to show my process of *bearing the discomfort of Weltschmerz* through completing a hypothetical 'Application for PGR Personal Circumstances' form. Just to be clear, my Weltschmerz is real, the form is real but this application for mitigating circumstance was not.

Chapter 5: The Covid-19 pandemic; in a world of pain

To research with Weltschmerz is twofold. I can recognise that suffering exists out there in the world, in its countless forms, whilst also being aware of my response to it. On the surface this may seem obvious, yet sitting with the relationship between these two folds has often meant that one side or the other has been hidden or avoided to manage my uncomfortable feeling. In the same way that we made memes to make fun of the pandemic, to curb our ever-increasing anxiety (Akram et al., 2021), the need to maintain a distance from Weltschmerz has seeped into my experience. I have felt it necessary to create space and zoom in and out on Weltschmerz, as though I am observing my own sadness from a distance. Again, this has been twofold. Firstly, out of fear of going blind whilst starring directly into the sun. By this, I mean both the personal pain that I have chosen to sit with, to become more aware of, whilst studying Weltschmerz and a worry that in being overexposed to the pain of the world I would become blinded, or desensitized, to it. This may be unavoidable but balancing the process of becoming more hardened and remaining motivated for action, as a 'what to do with Weltschmerz', has felt important. Secondly, to fully realise my understanding of the concept and communicate this to others, I must stay with how Weltschmerz feels. I have come to recognise the tension that exists between needing to feel something that is so uncomfortable and an instinct to push it away as a vital part of my experience of Weltschmerz. What follows in this chapter of analysis is my attempt to capture the dance between distance and proximity in my experience of Weltschmerz.

To capture some of this process I have selected images from The Guardian's 'the week around the world in 20 pictures' to create a timeline of just some of the events from around the world that coincided with the pandemic between March 2020 and March 2022. Accompanying this timeline is a narrative that captures key moments of the pandemic as it progressed in the UK. Within these bimonthly snapshots is some of the messaging I felt was most prevalent from the UK government in relation to the pandemic as well as my response, based on my continuous online research and discussions with others. The government messages are included in red text. I imagine them shouted in a trio of middle aged masculine quintessential English accents, presumably Eton educated. Whilst the black text I think of as being read in a British 'mongrel' accent, with subtle northern and Welsh inflections, much like my own.

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March 2022

It's been two years since the first UK lockdown and the smell of disinfectant has started to fade. The warnings, advice and mantras echoing from the past. A time that felt never-ending begins to feel like a three-day bender and the hangover is starting to set in. We won't know the long-term impact of the pandemic for years to come yet I'm left stewing in the sweaty 'hangxiety' of the aftermath. Our 'new normal' has shifted once again and I for one am left wondering what is new or normal now.

The world in chaos

Did the above timeline feel messy and chaotic to read? If yes, then good. It was a chaotic couple of years. Last time I checked the number of deaths in the UK with Covid-19 on the death certificate was 228,634 (Coronavirus (COVID-19) in the UK, 2023). Worldwide the figure was 6.951 million (WHO Coronavirus (COVID-19) Dashboard, 2023). I can't tell you how many times I have updated that figure.

Whilst confined to our houses, especially during the first national UK lockdown, messages about the pandemic were soaking through screens into my home and tainting the air, the way ink diffuses on paper. The more I read the more a thought formed; the pandemic changes everything and absolutely nothing all at once. The time the world was held in suspended animation – a temporary pause of its most vital functions (Mitchell, 2011). For instance, the global stock market ground to a halt, with market indices reaching a historical low between January and April 2020 (Senol & Zeren, 2020) and at one time during the pandemic, two-thirds of the world's planes were grounded, many stacked neatly on abandoned runways (Flyn, 2021). However, not all of mankind's activities ceased. Bullets continued to be shot with wars reigning on around the world and the pandemic even being instrumentalised by both nation-states and non-state parties (Blanc & Brown, 2020). Injustice continued to be delivered at the hands of 'law enforcement' with cases propelling wider discussions and protests surrounding racism and social disparities such as George Floyd's death in May 2020 (BBC News, 2020). Families continued to be displaced due to conflict and economic uncertainties with 82.4 million people being displaced by the end of 2020 – the highest recorded figure for displacements (Ireland, 2021). People continued to suffer and die for reasons not directly

linked to the pandemic. I have resonated with the suffering of others, imagining their experience, feelings and needs, empathising with them (McAuliffe et al., 2019). I became more aware than ever of the accumulation of events that depict world suffering daily and I found my experience of Weltschmerz intensified hand in hand.

But whilst some of mankind stood still, nature flourished. Rutz et al., (2020) coined the term 'anthropause' to refer to the 'great pause' in human activities, particularly that of travel, and emphasised the unprecedented circumstances for research that considers the impact of humans on animals. The impact of the anthropause on air travel saw a 40% reduction in CO_2 which are only expected to increase to pre-covid level in 2025 (Flyn, 2021). A global energy review by the International Energy Agency (2021) found that carbon emissions fell by a total of 5.8% which is the largest reduction since the second world war and is a large proportion of the estimated 7.6% cut believed to be necessary to prevent the 1.5C increase that would lead to devasting environmental crisis. Further evidence that global warming is indeed a manmade ecological issue. I felt more uplifted, like there was a silver lining – however thinly drawn - that the pandemic allowed nature some relief from the pollution and destruction of man. My experience of Weltschmerz seesawed from feeling heavy with the weight of the environmental crisis to feeling crushed by the impact of people on the world and each other.

Messages of global suffering were spread quickly through the media (Boltanski, 1999) and implied a sense of responsibility to act upon those witnessing the suffering (Nash, 2008). Some even suggest that governments were drip feeding information and censoring the bigger picture (Amnesty International UK, 2021) whilst others argue that we also experienced an 'infodemic' where we were flooded with disinformation, causing excessive distress (Xu & Liu, 2021). I experienced this excessive distress and found myself reverting to affect states of anger-rage and fear and terror (Tomkins, 2008). Collectively being submerged in media coverage of worldly events and these affective states, I may have been engaged in the process of 'magnification' where I was developing 'scripts', through connecting similar moments together (Tomkins, 2008). I was developing 'Weltschmerz scripts', which have become increasingly recognisable to me through my research process. The affective states of anger-rage and fear and terror spurred me on to engage in further research about worldly events and to consider ways in which I may be able to effect change in my daily life, such as

supporting specific charities or projects. However, experiencing an increase of the affective state of anguish (Tomkins, 2008) I also found myself withdrawing further into isolation when my ideal of a harmonious world was not realised or seeking out others who shared in these affective states in response to a disappointing and painful world.

Timeout

A wet muggy British day and I had taken some time out to stretch my legs, and mind, in nature. I embarked on the Offa's Dyke trail in the Forest of Dean that boasts picturesque views of Tintern Abbey from the Devil's Pulpit – a limestone outcrop suspended above the River Wye. The rain soaked through my shoes leaving my toes recoiling from soggy socks as I twisted and turned along the path that hugged the top of the hillside, offering the illusion of walking amongst the treetops of those rooted further down the slope. I came across a tree that appeared to be scorched. What was left of the tree gave the impression that it was once a large mature sturdy oak tree. I stood in place staring at the tree for some time wondering what could have happened to defeat such a strong entity. I thought of a natural occurrence, such as a lightning strike. But something inside me leant towards a more sinister human intervention - arson. A newspaper article titled *It's time to dust off the word weltschmerz* (Burkeman, 2015) came to mind which suggests Weltschmerz captures a sense of grief at how the world falls short of expectations. In that moment I was experiencing a sense of grief and deep disappointment at the thought that people choose to inflict such pain upon the world, pain that felt to be embodied in the lifeless bark in front of me. My aim to step away from Weltschmerz seemed to bring me closer it.

Weltschmerz in the face of inequality

In another attempt to take some timeout from Weltschmerz or perhaps to realise my increasing tendency to 'decathect' (Winnicott, 1953) - to detach from my ideals about the world in anticipation of future loss - I would turn to entertainment as a form of escapism. During the pandemic and whilst movement was restricted, this increasingly involved watching films and TV series. Perhaps unsurprisingly during a pandemic, the Hollywood medical set became a fascination of mine, with various medical equipment or machines representing being attached to an external life supporting entity that signified, to my mind, a paternal

figure. Grey's Anatomy, an American medical drama series, gripped my attention as they portrayed the devastation to life which came with working on the frontline in the pandemic. The below segment is taken from episode five in season 17 entitled *Fight the Power* and is a dialogue between two main characters: Dr Jackson Avery and Dr Richard Webber, discussing what it is like to be black during the pandemic.

> *Jackson: You realise half of our Covid patients are black and brown?*
>
> *Richard: I know.*
>
> *Jackson: In a city that's 7% black. Like how does that even compute?*
>
> *Richard: It doesn't.*
>
> *Jackson: If I hear one more person blame it on pre-existing conditions as if the conditions aren't manmade to begin with. Like we're not pushed into the front line of all of our jobs and forced to live in overcrowded situations, surrounded by environmental hazards.*
>
> *Richard: Yeah, people want to make everything bad that happens your own fault.*
>
> *Jackson: Yeah, when systemic racism is the root of the whole damn thing. Forget the 'pre' – it's the existing condition. Existing while black.*
>
> *(Rhimes, Clack, & Pride, 2020)*

Throughout the pandemic racial and ethnic minorities have suffered higher rates of infection, hospitalisation, and death than white people. In the US, data collected by the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, reported that Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, Hispanic and Black people were approximately twice as likely to die after contracting Covid-19 than their white counterparts (Ndugga, Hill, & Artiga, 2022). In the UK, data collected by the Office of Nation Statistics, showed that all ethnic minority groups have been at a higher mortality risk throughout the pandemic with Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities bearing the brunt of differential mortality (GOV.UK, 2022). With such large disparity between hospitalisation and death rates among ethnic minorities relative to white people, many

researchers went searching for an answer (to name just a few: Gaynor & Wilson, 2020; Laurencin & McClinton, 2020; Moore, et al. 2020; Pirtle, 2020). Poteat et al., (2020) framed their understanding around how the intersection of many historical factors and present-day health and social conditions created an environment where Black Americans experienced a greater impact from the pandemic. These 'factors include racism and its manifestations (e.g., chattel slavery, mortgage redlining, political gerrymandering, lack of Medicaid expansion, employment discrimination, and health care provider bias)' (p.1). Factors that have a lesser impact on white people (Poteat et al., 2020).

Jackson highlights black people being pushed to the front lines of their occupations. This is depicted by racial minorities and migrants, alongside low education, and waged people, being found to be overrepresented in key worker positions that were unable to be done remotely (OECD, 2022). At the risk of being let go and needing to put food on the table, many were faced with yet more impossible decisions. Front line workers kept the world running yet when they did encounter Covid-19 they were forced to seek help from a system tailored for white people. In the UK, a report conducted by the National Institute for Health Research showed that ethnic minorities made up only 9.26% of participants involved in research on Covid-19, a figure notably beneath their representation in the UK general population at 13.80% (Etti et al., 2021). Black and ethnic minority communities were often forced into unsafe positions to look after themselves and their families, putting them in harm's way. It feels like a 'rather them than us' mentality was formed, or rather continued. It feels sacrificial.

I am a white woman in a privileged position, and I have no intention to pretend to know or understand what it is like to be black or experience the same level of systemic prejudice or marginalisation (Kagan & Burton, 2005). I can witness others suffering from a distance (Boltanski, 1999), and I can attempt to empathise, and perhaps I will fail miserably. But I can bear witness. I position Weltschmerz as an affect that bonds us when I unable to fully empathise, as well as when I can. A connection that elicits affect to bridge the gap between space, socioeconomic status, sexuality, race. An affective state that binds us as humanity.

Chapter 6: A conversation

Below is *a conversation* between me and Miltos. Our supervision discussions on Weltschmerz have been ongoing throughout my research process. I have wrestled with my experiences of Weltschmerz within supervision, trying to mould something abstract into something more tangible that can be captured on paper. The process has not been linear, nor would it have been easy alone, as supervision has helped me to revisit "the pain…necessary in many types of autoethnographies" (Chatham-Carpenter, 2010, p.10). I have felt able to draw upon uncomfortable experiences and memories in my writing, in part, because my process has felt jointly held in the 'container' (Bion, 1962) of supervision. In a bid to share some of this process, I have included a back and forth between me and Miltos from the moment the idea was conceived on the telephone and then continued via email.

The phone rings. Technically it doesn't ring because it's on silent; it vibrates and flashes. That's what smartphones do these days, capture our attention with flashing lights, bells, and whistles. Providing a short-lived hit of dopamine before our dwindling attention span slips us back into withdrawal and we're forced to reengage with the task at hand. Luckily, this time when the phone beckons it's Miltos – excited to talk research, which always reignites my enthusiasm.

Amelia: *Hello?*

Miltos: *Hey. I had a thought about your research. How about you try to capture some of our conversations throughout the years in your analysis?*

Amelia: *Sounds interesting, but how do you mean? Like including your feedback in the write-up?*

Miltos: *No not the feedback as such, but maybe some prompts that show the back-and-forth process.*

Amelia: *Oh, you mean like actually include a conversation of ours? Like an email exchange?*

Miltos: *Yes exactly! Something that shows your process and developing thoughts on the topic.*

Amelia: *Oh I see! I could even try free writing to help me start the process off. I like this idea.*

Miltos: *Great, let's give it a go.*

Amelia: *Ok! Maybe I'll even end up using this conversation too! I feel inspired, like I need to put pen to paper…or fingers to keyboard?*

Hi Miltos,

Although I was originally inspired, the task of trying to put my thoughts on Weltschmerz on paper feels anything but simple. The more I try to pull apart one element to zoom in on and unpack, the more intertwined all the elements start to become. I often describe the way I have come to understand my dyslexia and the way I store and use information like a spider's web – data points interconnected by multiple intersecting lines of thoughts, feelings, and imagery. After sitting with the concept for years now, I have created my own Weltschmerz web whilst attempting to make sense of my understandings and experiences of the concept. I think this speaks to the complexity of Weltschmerz and how it is experienced on a subjective level, somehow so intensely private yet capturing concern for so many and the entity of the world itself. For me, I have noticed that my affective indicators of Weltschmerz take the form of despair or a deep sadness that often comes laden with a consuming fatigue.

Perhaps it is down to our profession, but when I think of a deep sadness, I am hard pressed not to gravitate towards thoughts on melancholy. I am certainly not the first to make a connection between melancholy and Weltschmerz. Melancholy is known for being a feeling that goes beyond sadness but that is difficult to place. Weltschmerz may be seen in a similar way – that there is no easy to identify singular cause which we can point at and say, "that's

it!". Rather, it feels to me like there is an accumulation of things to point at. Some from a distance and some closer to home. I'm drawn to thinking about the significant relationships I have had and lost, with a recent breakup from a long-term relationship coming to mind. Relationships coming to an end, for any reason, are often entwined with grief, longing and loss. My recent experience was no different. Not only did I experience the loss of the object of my love and affection but also the loss of the love itself. Maybe this is what people refer to as becoming 'hardened', but I feel that such experience predisposes me to feel loss on a wider scale. It is the perception of the loss which seems to matter.

I can't help but think of the recent shooting in a Texas primary school (Robb Elementary School, 24th May 2022) and the images flooding the internet. Images of distraught parents, where no words can describe their pain. The picture of innocence in the children's faces who were brutally murdered. Alongside the mug shot of the child who killed them. How did humanity get here? When we see such tragic events take place it's not hard to lose all faith in an idealised image of humanity, even when we may be those who are looked to for signs of hope. I feel torn with so much love and hope for this world, and so much scepticism, pessimism and fear. I feel this ambivalence within my own Weltschmerz, as a necessary component, which is intensified when the world – when people - do not live up to my ideal. This disillusionment I turn in upon myself – revelling in suffering, like seeking satisfaction of this sadistic trend. When I think of how I have worked on endings, from significant relationships with others, the cities I've lived in and roles I have occupied, the bittersweet nostalgic sensation I often experience speaks to an intolerance. Alongside the sense of inadequacy in the face of human failing - to inflict pain and suffering. Perhaps then, Weltschmerz, isn't necessarily characterised by melancholia per se but by what underpins melancholia - an intolerance for object loss.

Warmth and wonder,

Amelia

Hi Amelia,

I am curious to hear more about the individual / social distinction you mention a couple of times. Let me see how to put this as I'm formulating it in my mind…Where do you end and the world begins? Can you write something more from that boundary perhaps?

Wonder and warmth,

M.

Hi Miltos,

That's an interesting question – where do I end and the world begins? My immediate, slightly tongue in cheek reaction, is to say my skin. A physical flesh boundary that contains 'me' and separates me from the world. But the more I think about it, the more blurred the boundary becomes. As a relational practitioner – a term counselling psychologists seem to use with endearment – I believe that the way we develop as people is through other people. We create representations of others in our minds before we even understand that we are a separate entity. We are embedded within our social contexts and grow in the space in between, never finishing but always in a state of becoming. This multifaceted bi-directional interplay between ourselves, others, and the world, to me suggests that on a fundamental level we are intimately connected. I find how this boundary relates to Weltschmerz to fall within the 'troublesome concepts' category, where one day I feel I have a good grasp on how to articulate this and on other days I return to feeling lost in the blurred nature of the boundary. It is in everyday life where I find examples of this boundary becoming more 'tangible' and so I'd like to share with you my experience of a day last week, Friday to be exact.

This morning I was curled over, barely able to move. A gnawing, dragging, feeling across my lower abdomen. Sharp stabbing sensations shooting down both my thighs. The word 'cramps' feels as though it does little justice to the pain I have become so accustomed to every month.

A pain that holds me hostage for several days and a pain that made me seek help from those who supposedly know better. Following rounds of internal ultrasounds - being prodded, examined and inspected by nurses, doctors and specialists – eventually an ovarian cyst the size of a golf ball was found and described as 'bleeding in on itself'. Bleeding in on itself – there was something about the pattern in this phrase that has stayed with me. Although objectified through the term 'it(self)', the use of 'self' somehow personified my cyst to represent a bleeding, dying, part of myself beyond the physical sack of fluid that was likely subjecting my ovary to torsion. A suggested diagnosis of endometriosis being the 'best guess' explanation and all the supposed 'comfort' I needed to stop asking questions. A part of me, a part that wasn't there before and that did not belong, was dying and it was my job to 'keep an eye on it' – this thing I can't see – and bear the discomfort.

Back to this morning and my wallowing was interrupted by my phone flashing and vibrating, it was my sister – 'Olivia'- or rather a friend who is so close that I consider her to be a sister. I almost didn't answer, questioning whether I would be able to hold a decent conversation whilst waiting for the last round of painkillers to kick in. I took a deep breath, cleared my throat, and prepared to hide the irritation of discomfort from my voice. Or at least that was my plan. On answering the phone, I was met with the name she calls me:

Olivia: 'Jane?'.

A simple four-letter word that held so much weight in that moment. I knew immediately what was coming next.

Olivia: 'There's no heartbeat'.

She whispered, as though speaking quietly would make the statement less true. Followed quickly by the sound of her struggling to gasp for air between an onslaught of sobs.

Olivia: 'It's gone Jane.'

My heart sank as silent tears rolled down my cheek. Now the word 'it' bares all the possibility of life, but not today. A part of her, a part that wasn't there before and that apparently did not 'belong', was dying and it was her job to 'keep an eye on it' – this thing she can't see – and bear the discomfort.

It was still considered 'early days' in pregnancy. The statistics warn of the possibility of a miscarriage, especially with your first and past a certain age. Warnings that are echoed by society and the narrative of being 'past your prime', a 'best by' date that only applies to those identifying as a woman and motherhood. These ideas around motherhood seem to be implicit within the 'collective unconscious', alongside the mother archetype that often symbolises transformation, rebirth, and a longing for redemption on the one hand, and the potential for death and devastation on the other. So implicit, that we rise to consciousness through a semi unconscious social process that builds upon a constellation of feminine archetypes. Supposedly then the suffering of women is effectively inherent in the development of our psyches.

Today I am struck by the everyday suffering of womankind. The universal suffering of being a sexed being. Everything comes back to sex and death – to Eros and Thanatos - to beginnings and endings. Pain is interwoven and feared in both. As Freud would say, if 'the aim of all life is death' then considering the self-destructive nature of humankind, if that's against one another in war or even before one has left the womb, then the pain humanity faces whether physical, emotional, or even metaphorical serves a purpose. It reminds us that we are – Eros and Thanatos playing tug of war with our very being. Doesn't that sound exhausting? No wonder I am unable to sit, fatigue free, with the contemplation of where Weltschmerz may arise from.

Today I keep coming back to a sense of feeling discomfort, for myself, for Olivia and for women more broadly, recognising the empathy that underpins this. Projection is the foundation of empathy which enables me to better understand other's subjective experiences. But projection also allows me to disown the parts of myself that I don't like or identify with. Speaking generally, I believe we often don't like to think of ourselves as lacking (if that's via envy, jealously or inactivity), as angry or as fundamentally destructive and driven by a death instinct. Maybe these are so big, so unconsciously rooted, that an individual recipient seems unable to hold the magnitude of the projection. Maybe in many circumstances it just feels too cruel, so instead we project them onto the 'collective unconscious'? The faceless emblematic psyche capable of absorbing the darkest of shadows. Maybe this is one way we connect and traumatically bond over grief. Encompassed within this and the archetype of death is the symbolisation of 'salvation'. A liberation of sorts through suffering and loss. So perhaps

Weltschmerz serves a purpose as a way for us to engage suffering and loss in a drive for salvation. It is a part of us, a part that wasn't there before and that might not belong, that's dying, and it is our job to 'keep an eye on it' – this thing we can't see – and bear the discomfort.

Wondering where the warmth has gone,

Amelia

Hi Amelia,

Baring the discomfort; that really resonates with our discipline's foundations, doesn't it? You know it's funny, all these years we've been working together I've harboured this 'anxiety' that you might be essentialising Weltschmerz; reifying a totally abstract construct into a thing that pre-exists discourse. The above segment has shaken that 'anxiety'. I feel energised and disturbed at the same time. Like you've tapped into something too complicated for me to understand. Like you've gone to the source…

Miltos

Analysis of *a conversation*

I found the process of writing to be cathartic. Autoethnographies often omit the struggle that is frequently experienced during the writing process (Chatham-Carpenter, 2010) and so this is my attempt of showing my ongoing tussle with trying to make sense of Weltschmerz which also plays a role in shaping it. I let it develop as free writing, attempting to let my thoughts unravel in an organic manner. This allowed me to express my fragmented thoughts and feelings around Weltschmerz. I have left the back and forth largely unedited, in the manner that it poured out of me at the time of writing. You may be able to detect traces of theories in the conversation, that inform my words and how I have come to understand Weltschmerz.

Reflecting on the conversation, I am very tempted to draw out all these theories but have resisted - or heavily edited most of them out.

In therapeutic pursuits, we often talk about defence mechanisms. Ways that we use to avoid exploring painful things or emotions (Freud, 1936). My whole research has been focused around exploring something painful and I have had to battle with the urge to look away and avoid the pain. This urge has been debilitating at times, in the sense that I have stared frozen at a blank document for hours. During times of so-called production, yet another defensive tactic was in play, intellectualisation (Cariola, 2020). I wrote thousands of words but said very little in my own voice. I had retreated to a space where I was trying to hide my fear of being found out as 'lacking' beneath the words and knowledge of others. I'm afraid of saying the wrong thing. I have learnt to cope with this sense of uncertainty by listening deeply to others and when presented with feedback about my work, absorbing it into my sense of being. Weltschmerz exacerbates my sense of uncertainty and the feeling I get when I don't have the 'right' answer because Weltschmerz itself is, an elusive affect that escapes a simple comfortable definition. It is complex and, as the word implies, it is replete with pain. To navigate some of this complexity, I have pulled out just two threads from the conversation to explore further; *Melancholia and object loss,* and *going to the source*, where I discuss how weltschmerz may be interwoven and symbolised within the unconscious.

Melancholia and object loss

Within *a conversation* I gravitated towards discussing the relationship between melancholy and Weltschmerz, drawn by a similarity that they are hard to define, have no singular cause and may be characterised, for me, by deep despondency and longing. I am inspired by Axelrod (2016) who considered the psychoanalytic poetics of Weltschmerz in Mikhail Lermontov's *a hero of our times.* Axelrod (2016) is also drawn to discussing Freud and melancholy to probe Weltschmerz. He examines the psychogenic bases for experiencing the concept, roused by either/both interpersonal process in the form of projection-projective identification (Klein, 1975a) or sociological influences on the individual, highlighting the creation of a stimulus-response system. Axelrod (2016) asks a question that is fundamental to my research, 'what causative agent(s) predispose(s) an individual to emote these representative expressions of

Weltschmerz, and what, then, is Weltschmerz for that particular individual?' (p.10). Whilst for Lermontov Weltschmerz was most closely related to melancholia (Axelrod, 2016), I believe that this is just one component of my experience of Weltschmerz.

Object loss, both the object itself and the idea of the object, is a predisposing factor in eliciting melancholy. The object may be real or abstract (Axelrod, 2016; Freud, 1957) and in much the same way as Axelrod (2016) interpreted the underlying interpersonal and societal components to Lermontov's melancholia, I began to do the same in *a conversation*. I drew upon a recent day in my life where someone very close to me began to experience a miscarriage. Just before receiving the phone call, I was suffering from severe pain linked to my suspected endometriosis, a condition where tissue that is usually found within the womb grows elsewhere (e.g., the ovaries) (NHS, 2022). Exactly two weeks later Roe v. Wade, the 1973 landmark ruling that protected women's right to choose and have access to safe abortions, was overturned by the US Supreme Court (Glenza & Pengelly, 2022). My friend, 'Olivia', who suffered the miscarriage required medical treatment to expel the tissue from her body. This treatment was labelled a 'medical abortion' and without this treatment her health may have been seriously at risk. In many US states, under new regulations triggered by the overturning of Roe v. Wade (The New York Times, 2023, track where abortion is banned – currently standing at 14 states), Olivia would not have had access to this potentially lifesaving medical treatment.

There were multiple layers of loss intertwined within this experience, both real and abstract – although this binary is beginning to feel redundant. There was the loss of a foetus, which came with a loss of blood. What is more 'real' than the loss of blood? It also came with the loss of future possibilities and the loss of future identities, like the identity of mother. Internal object relations can help a mourner to figure out their identity in relation to the deceased. When we lose someone or something, we don't just lose the person, the loss impacts our internal object relationship with the person. This includes our image of the object, the way we feel about them and how we feel about ourselves without the other. In mourning, we can maintain this relationship with the other by holding onto the way they are represented within us whilst also allowing space to develop new object relations or investing in new relationships (Baker, 2001; Berzoff, 2003). I like to think that Olivia finds some comfort in the persistence

of the attachment to her internal object relation and the process of transformation that has befallen this relationship, where inner and outer relating to objects retains balance (Baker, 2001).

Taking another step backwards, with the ruling in the US (Glenza & Pengelly, 2022) there was also a loss of the freedom of choice and loss of women's bodily autonomy, which I find infuriating. Yet, I cannot let go of hope for a more equitable world. This conflict, perhaps due to ambivalence, constitutes an element of melancholia (Axelrod, 2016; Freud, 1957). I feel this as an internal wrestle between love and hate, which I act upon in the form of lashing out towards 'the people in power' and everything 'they' represent. But ultimately, I turn this upon myself as I just feel worse for not raising my own voice louder in protest or because my own body subjects itself to a monthly cycle of suffering that confronts me with my own deliberations about having children. Similarly, to Lermontov, I feel as though I too currently hold an inability to gain a lost ideal (Axelrod, 2016), in the way the world works, in politics and in what feels fair or humane. I feel the intolerance for object loss that underpins melancholia, and which may characterise Weltschmerz.

Going to the source

The idea of 'the source' can be found within various fields of study and cultures around the world. In the field of physics, one possible attribution of the source may be within the second law of thermodynamics which assumes that equilibrium is found at the point of maximum entropy (Turns & Pauley, 2020), subsequently we all decay and return to the natural state of molecular chaos. In cosmology, the source may refer to the Big Bang, the volatile unfathomably densely packed singularity from which energy and matter erupted (Edwards, 2021). For many religions the source is considered God or a celestial being or place. From all corners of the world there are similarities in ancient creation myths, with a thread throughout them which returns consciousness to an awakening often referred to as enlightenment (e.g., Scharf, 2020). In the field of psychology, the 'source' may arguably refer to the unconscious. At least, when Miltos stated 'like you've gone to the source…' whilst referring to reifying an abstract construct into something that pre-exists discourse, the unconscious is where my mind immediately retreated.

Weltschmerz as interwoven into the fabric of my being

Weltschmerz requires an 'other' to be experienced and so discussing the concept within *a conversation* enabled the collision and interaction of two subjectivities (Kuchuck, 2021) in the form of me and Miltos. Intersubjectivity is essentially what may make Weltschmerz possible. Our perceptions of the world are shaped by others and with others. For example, if I were to look at a piece of artwork or listen to a song with a friend, we may start to discuss what we see or hear and how it makes us feel. Through our discussion we may come to realise that we have different responses and interpretations of the piece. But as we continue to talk about what we perceive and the way it makes us feel, we begin to find similarities or points where we connect in our perspectives. Our shared experience of perceiving and discussing the piece leads to a deeper mutual understanding of each other's thoughts and feelings, producing a shared understanding of the piece itself which now constitutes something of the other (Merleau-Ponty, 1968). Similarly, conversations on Weltschmerz offer a platform for exchanging ideas, challenging assumptions, and expanding our awareness of the broader socio-cultural dimensions that intersect with Weltschmerz. In this dynamic process, we not only enhance our understanding of Weltschmerz through the perspectives of others but also enrich our own lived experience of it by embracing different viewpoints and integrating new knowledge into our personal narrative.

Within *a conversation* I draw out my desire, for a better understanding of suffering and its purpose. Desire shapes my perception and behaviour to be deeply interconnected with others and the world (Sartre, 2021). A desire that motivates me to seek out and pursue Weltschmerz as a way to find meaning in my experience and help establish my own sense of identity within a world full of pain. Weltschmerz represents, to me, a desire for connection and intersubjectivity as Weltschmerz experienced together may be bearable, Weltschmerz experienced alone may be crushing. Within *a conversation* I am sharing the weight of Weltschmerz with Miltos, connected and co-creating within my experience and desire to not be in it alone.

In my second response, I state, 'we create representations of others in our minds before we even understand that we are a separate entity'. This statement was largely shaped by my understanding of Object Relations theory, especially as articulated by Klein. Klein (1959;

1975a) thought of experience as forming from the interchange between internal and external worlds. An exchange that sees images and feelings projected into another and the reality of the external world introjected, absorbed into the inner world. Therefore, what we integrated into our experience, into ourselves, fundamentally becomes part of who we are. When I am faced with a world that I perceive as letting me down, when I perceive hateful and oppressive acts of humankind, I absorb this into myself and my worldview.

The process of absorbing others and the world into myself started as an infant. Although pretty 'woke' for their age, my parents are from a generation that held 'traditional' views and values that may now be consider outdated. Looking back, I can see that they were a product of their generation – well-intentioned but also unaware of the consequences of the language they used. Language that was culturally constructed, available, and acting as a vehicle for desire (Foucault, 2005). For example, I recall many comments about homosexuality which reflected societal messages of late 20th Century. A beloved TV show of mine growing up was 'Friends' - a group of white, straight, cis people aiming to 'make it' through conventional norms of a good job and a partner of the opposite sex. Okay, Phoebe's sexuality may not have been entirely cemented as straight but equally I don't recall her dating anyone who didn't identify as a cis man. I internalised these messages, particularly from my parents to the point that I brushed off any inclination that I may be anything other than straight until well into my 20s. I remember feeling repulsed by the idea of being with another woman. When I did start to acknowledge my attraction towards women, initially I was filled with shame and confusion. I tried to reject the thought entirely to protect myself from feeling uncomfortable.

I wonder whether I have done something similar with my experience of Weltschmerz. For example, deploying a primitive defence, such as projective identification, that serves to expel persecutory anxieties to hold myself together (Klein, 1975a). This type of communication involves the sender projecting emotions or experiences onto another person, who then experiences those unwanted emotions as if they were their own. This is particularly effective when anxiety is heightened, as the sender may project entire aspects of themselves into the receiver. By doing so, they may banish parts of themselves that feel too painful to confront and create an illusion of control over others and the world around them (Klein, 1975a). The reluctance to face world pain, combined with the ability to gift it to others, may be central to

my understanding of Weltschmerz. I understand the desire for it to stop. It's frustrating to witness others destroying the planet and perpetuating injustice without taking action to combat it. I value equality and although not entirely 'out' I am proud of my sexuality. But when I think of sharing this part of myself with my parents, I feel a knee-jerk reaction to withdraw. It's a feeling of disgust, but I question whether it's truly mine or a projection of the attitudes I've encountered. Similarly, I question whether part of my Weltschmerz belongs to others, or perhaps the question is how much of the other is within my 'own' Weltschmerz?

Symbolic representations of Weltschmerz

In *a conversation*, I make reference to Jung's (1968b) collective unconscious as a place where individuals may direct their projections that are too big or too cruel to be received by others. Whilst searching for a 'neat' example to explain my point, I'm drawn towards an example I have previously mentioned in the conversation- when I lash out towards 'the people in power' and everything 'they' represent. For instance, this may be when I am talking about the climate crisis or another issue which feels insurmountable yet hanging on the actions of most governments around the world to make sustainable choices and pass legislation that supports this move. 'They' are the faceless representative of a problem that is bigger than any one person, even any one government.

The collective unconscious is suggested by Jung (1968b) to be expressed through archetypes that are often weighted with emotion as relationships are based on the differences between dominant archetypal spheres. For example, the prevalence of the mother archetype in family-orientated cultures. The emotions and symbols contained within a structure may indicate a particular archetype, with Jung (1963) arguing that symbols appear in dreams and psychiatric manifestations alike. Over the years that I have been discussing and pondering Weltschmerz, I have had many dreams that have symbolically manifested Weltschmerz. However, the example I am going to provide is of a dream that belonged to 'Justin', a fellow trainee Counselling Psychologist, because when I think of a way to visualise Weltschmerz the image that still comes back to my mind is the one which was created whilst they explained their dream to me.

Lent up against a pillar in a courtyard at UWE Bristol, I'm shooting the breeze with peers whilst taking in some much-needed fresh air between lectures. The conversation quickly turns to

the topic of research, not unusual for Prof Doc students. I had recently discussed my topic in some depth with Justin who was intrigued by the concept and shared that he had dreamt of Weltschmerz the previous night. The following is my reflection of the dream, from Justin's viewpoint.

> *I was laid down, but not asleep. Plugged into a system by something that resembled a head jack – like in the Matrix. I was connected to everything, to the world, through these wires. But they weren't wires. They were roots. Or more a mycorrhizal pathway where messages and signals were seamlessly transmitted in pulses of energy. The network was alive, I could feel it, feel others connected to it. I could feel their pain, each one individually but also collectively at the same time. I could feel the aching pain of the world itself.*

It gave me goosebumps listening to Justin describe his dream because it's not dissimilar to dreams I have had myself and how I have come to recognise the manifestation of Weltschmerz within my conscious, and perhaps unconscious, mind. I have also seen The Matrix (1999) and recognise that Justin and I may have assimilated the dystopian messages of the franchise. Perhaps the Matrix similarity in our dreams is a way for us to project our anxieties about the 'real' world succumbing to a similar fate of being destroyed by man. This supports Campbells (1949) claim that we can experience universal truths that may act to guide us and that dreams may be a way to access these 'truths', derived from the social collective (Lawrence, 2018). Reflecting on the dream, Justin commented on how he felt more connected to 'everything' on a deeper primitive level which looking back now reminds me of the transcendental numinous (Jung, 1963). Interestingly, Justin shared how at first others suffering felt overwhelming, possibility symbolising the shadow or the socially unacceptable qualities or impulses that he was finding intolerable. It threatened to consume him but as he sat with the uncomfortable feeling it was as if he could make room for it, as though he was integrating it into his own experience – perhaps as a transmutation process akin to individuation (Jung, 1968a). The more we spoke about his dream, the more synchronous (Cambray, 2009; Jung, 1991) we believed it to be, each describing symbolic archetypal connections that we increasingly recognised as Weltschmerz. We co-constructed and held in

conversation an image, an intersubjective one, that has stayed with me and has come to symbolise my experience of Weltschmerz.

Although Jung (1968b) acknowledged that there are likely countless archetypes, he paid particular attention to a few including: the self, the persona, the anima/animus, the shadow and the mother. The mother is the archetype I make reference to within *a conversation.* It appears in many different forms, from the personal mother figure and women who may occupy a 'typical' maternal role to representations of mother as seen in religions or mythology (Jung, 1968b). For example, in Greek mythology 'mother' may be akin to the Gaia, the Greek Goddess of the earth, who has been suggested to represent a 'reproductive anxiety' (Rose, 1991). In *a conversation*, the mother archetype refers to the personal – in the form of my friend who was beginning to become accustomed to the idea of motherhood before experiencing a miscarriage – and in a more figurative sense as a representation for yearning for redemption, transformation and rebirth. In line with Jung (1956), I draw upon the idea that there are two sides of the same coin: the caring mother and the terrible mother. This enabled me to acknowledge the potential for death and devastation within the mother archetype, again referencing the personal symbol of loss within the miscarriage and the figurative within the dominant narrative surrounding the ticking biological clock.

Chapter 7: The conference - a shift in perspective

I presented my research at the 2022 DCoP Conference (Hadjiosif, Ince & Martin, 2022), an experience that became another source of inspiration that would inform my analysis. Writing from the perspective of Thomas, a fictional counselling psychologist who I imagined attended my talk, I attempt to capture my fantasy of what it is like to encounter the term Weltschmerz for the first time. In reflecting on Thomas' experience, I consider potential resistance to Weltschmerz and where Weltschmerz may be positioned within the current landscape of mental health in the UK. The following fictional story is narrated from Thomas' perspective as he attends the conference.

> *Stood outside the archaic Grad I listed building, often considered 'a modernist masterpiece' by the architecture industry, the Royal College of Physicians loomed in all its 1960's concrete glory. On entry, I was greeted warmly, registered, and handed a conference goodie bag. Intrigued to explore my newfound goodies, I reached inside. My hand sweeps past something that is an unusual shape and feels like rubber. Unsatisfied, I decide to peer inside the bag. I was pleased to find a stress-ball-esque item, in the shape of a BPS logo-branded house. I chuckle to myself briefly before reaching back into the bag, this time aiming for the conference programme booklet. I start thumbing the pages, eager to explore all that the conference has to offer. A few talks immediately grab my interest, and I can already see that I will have some difficult decisions to make on which to attend. Towards the back of the booklet, I come across a symposium: "Autoethnography: Let there be Chaos'. Well, colour me intrigued. A memory springs to mind: didn't my colleague Maxine mention autoethnography and how well it fits with our discipline's principles? I was dubious then but now I'm keen to learn more, about autoethnography and now also Weltschmerz. What a strange word. I google it. Interesting.*
>
> *A few hours later….*

The air con within the Wolfson theatre is a pleasant relief from the sweltering temperatures of the London heatwave. I sit just off centre but towards the back of the auditorium. The room is not full but there is a low buzz of attendees chatting. Three sprightly looking folk go on stage – they must be trainees - I look at their abstract and notice that 'Weltschmerz' has been misspelled and 'autobiography' has replaced 'autoethnography'. Does autoethnography mean autobiography?

A round of applause for the first speaker followed by a quick change of slide. In large letters spread across a screen that takes up almost an entire wall the word "Weltschmerz". The Weltschmerz talk is positioned to respond to the question; "what chaos would be unleashed if we free ourselves from the constrains of traditional qualitative research?" What could that mean for the topics we study; which pathologising notions of mental health could we shake to the core?

25 minutes later…

The talk reaches its conclusion and we, as the audience, are asked to complete a brief two-question survey by scanning a QR code. I didn't realise you could have surveys with 2 questions, yet mine felt like a life interview. Firstly, a 'simple' yes or no question, "Have you ever experienced Weltschmerz?". Hmmm…, I have just learnt this term for the first time today, how can I know if I have ever felt it before? Goose bumps raise up both my arms, but perhaps that is just the air con. I am momentarily distracted by the recognition that I have transitioned from sweltering warm to quiet cold. Focus; have I ever experienced Weltschmerz? Images flash through my mind so quickly they begin to blur together. Images of war, natural disasters, police brutality and the person sleeping rough I walked past last night on my way home to a comfortable bed. Where are these coming from? The goose bumps reach the nape of my neck. Someone should really turn down that air con. This is uncomfortable. Okay, I'll tick yes to answer the question. I can relate to

experiencing world-pain, or this uncomfortable feeling when I think of the world in pain.

The second question asks, "are there any other words or short phrases that you might use to describe this feeling/experience?". The more I lean into Weltschmerz the less suitable any other term starts to feel to precisely describe this sensation. Ironically, now that I've tried Weltschmerz on for size, I feel uncomfortable trying to think of another way to describe the experience. Oh shit. My client, the Iraqi guy I see first thing on Mondays. I wonder if he has Weltschmerz?! Fatigue washes over me. It all suddenly feels too much. 'Weariness' is fitting as I am trying to find a term that names something I am not used to naming. A word I didn't know I was missing…I am getting a kebab after this conference. Before I start salivating, my phone buzzes. It's the blonde from Tinder with the piercing eyes. I hope they're free tonight.

'Hey, what do you think of this Weltschmerz?'

A voice close by interrupts the comfort of my savoury, and unsavoury, thoughts. Another seemingly innocent question yet I am struggling to form an intelligible answer after going through what feels like an emotional spin cycle. I revert to my British sensibilities.

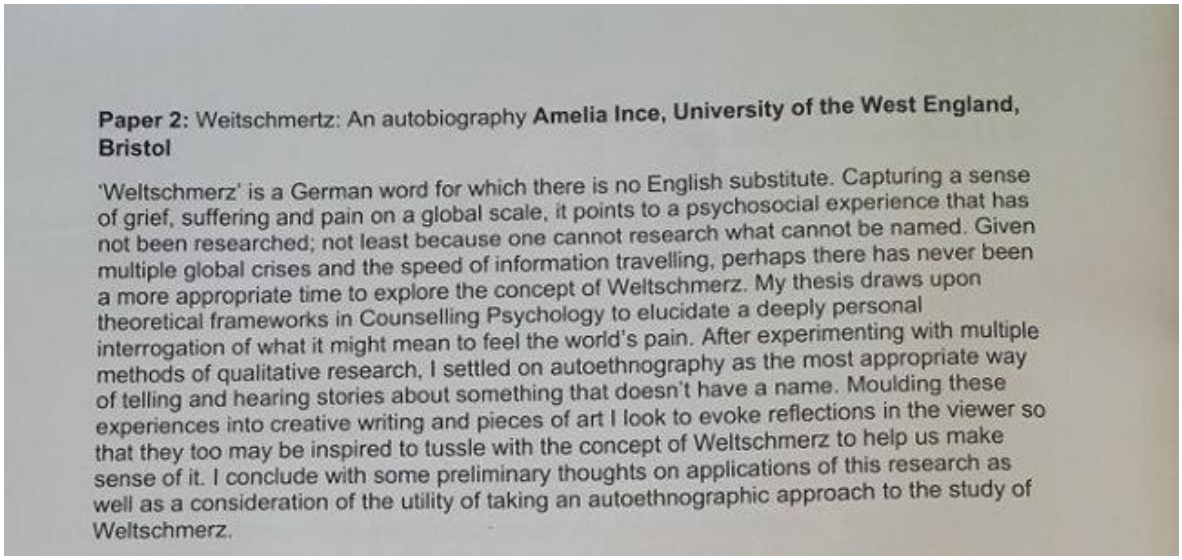
'Yeah, it sounds like a useful concept.'

Okay, that was at least half true. I do believe it might be a worthwhile concept to ponder. But it still doesn't sit entirely right. There is this nagging question that keeps coming back to my mind that is making me feel kinda uneasy; is it even possible to experience a term that is born out of all the historical and generational experiences of another culture? Before I have time to dwell on my question the next speaker mentions something about drag performers and my intrigue is pleasantly swept in another direction for the remainder of the talk.

Leaving the conference, I blink repetitively as I step out in the bright daylight, the sun's rays warming my chilled skin. Someone steps, or rather jumps, on my

grave throwing my body into a sharp convulsion as if something is being exorcised from deep within. I take a left, setting my sights on Soho in search for a bar to meet my date and knowing there's plenty of kebab houses around there. I join the post-work throng flowing towards the city centre and as I gain some distance from the Royal College of Physicians, I feel the emotional charge of encountering Weltschmerz beginning to dissipate. At least I can step away from it, right? Images of death and destruction, alongside seemingly innocent memories, are dancing on the 'edge of awareness' – I chuckle to myself as I appreciate how I am experiencing the theme of the conference. I wipe a rouge tear from my cheek. Great, my hay fever is kicking off again.

The Freudian typo



Paper 2: Weitschmertz: An autobiography **Amelia Ince, University of the West England, Bristol**

'Weltschmerz' is a German word for which there is no English substitute. Capturing a sense of grief, suffering and pain on a global scale, it points to a psychosocial experience that has not been researched; not least because one cannot research what cannot be named. Given multiple global crises and the speed of information travelling, perhaps there has never been a more appropriate time to explore the concept of Weltschmerz. My thesis draws upon theoretical frameworks in Counselling Psychology to elucidate a deeply personal interrogation of what it might mean to feel the world's pain. After experimenting with multiple methods of qualitative research, I settled on autoethnography as the most appropriate way of telling and hearing stories about something that doesn't have a name. Moulding these experiences into creative writing and pieces of art I look to evoke reflections in the viewer so that they too may be inspired to tussle with the concept of Weltschmerz to help us make sense of it. I conclude with some preliminary thoughts on applications of this research as well as a consideration of the utility of taking an autoethnographic approach to the study of Weltschmerz.

The title of my talk was misprinted within the conference abstract booklet. As you can see from Thomas' experience this left him, and possibly others who attended the talk, questioning whether autoethnography and autobiography are interchangeable. However, I am keen to explore whether the misprint of Weltschmerz was a telling thing, a Freudian typo so to speak, belying the current landscape of professional psychology practice. If the typo had been around something more recognisable then perhaps a proof-reader would have picked it up. This begs the question: what would be considered more recognisable? Something like depression or anxiety I suppose.

To step outside of the medical model is hard. Considering alternative ways of perceiving mental distress that does not align with this psycho-political influence is hard. It goes against what we are often taught via representations of mental health that are organised in structures of power as practices, such as the DSM/ICD diagnoses or government-led public heath funding. Just like the largely uncontested diagnostic category 'depression' has facilitated the medicalisation of sadness (Moncrieff, 2011), and normalised the idea that given the right concoction of medication and thought challenging techniques our depression can be 'fixed', I am wary of essentialising Weltschmerz or feeding the 'McDonaldization of psychotherapy' (Goodman, 2015). As psychologists we are the brokers of language and concepts that can reify personal distress that has roots in the relational (Milton, 2010). In accordance with Counselling Psychology philosophy, and in a bid to de-pathologize those who deviate, Weltschmerz is positioned as a possible and normal response to a neoliberal society whilst also adding to language which captures this step away from the medicalisation of mental health.

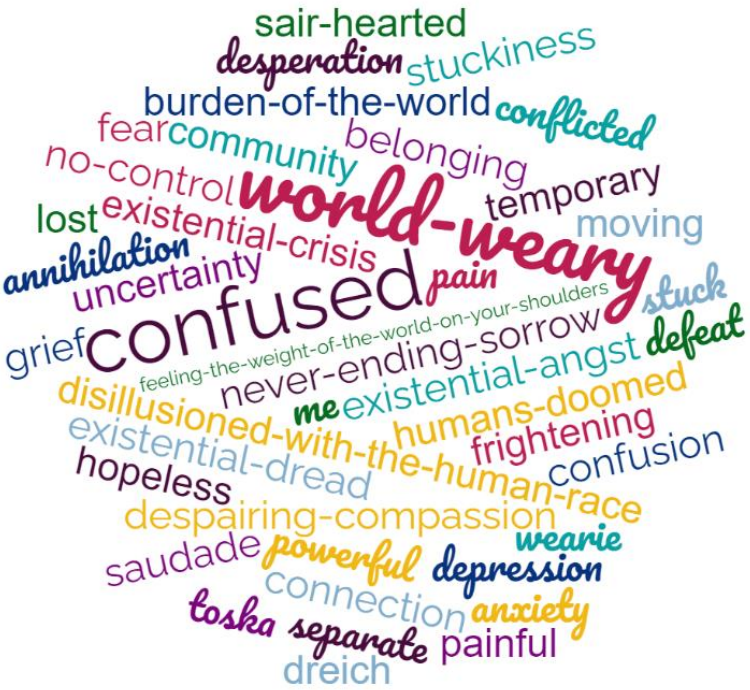
If we, as psychologists but also the public, continue to use medicalised language to describe psychological distress in the face of a challenging relational world then we will continue to fragment and ignore Weltschmerz. Whilst I have been writing my thesis, absorbed within my experience of Weltschmerz I have experienced some 'unexplainable' physical symptoms. I have experienced waves of fatigue for a number of years now, most likely linked to expected endometriosis, but have noticed an increase in the length and the depth of the fatigue. In the late summer of 2022, I developed chronic urticaria hives alongside severe chest pain and since that time noticed a very significant increase in dermatitis. I have followed conventional medicine, initially visiting A&E with the chest pain on the advice of 111, spoken to my GP and had a myriad of tests for allergies, deficiencies, thyroid function and so on. No medical test to date has found anything 'wrong' with me. There has, of course, been a correlation found between chronic spontaneous urticaria (CSU) and mental distress (Patella et al., 2021; Schut et al., 2019; Seema et al., 2021). Whilst I recognised the stress linked to completing a professional doctorate, after much deliberation myself, with doctors and within my personally therapy, my increased stress levels appear to only play a part in my CSU. My research, or more specifically the depth and quality of the Weltschmerz I was experiencing, also appear to play a significant role. I am not looking to rectify an abstract concept into

something physical or ascribe physically 'symptoms' to Weltschmerz. Rather by adopting a holistic approach to my experience, I am willing to acknowledge that, after ruling out other possibilities, I can gain a better understanding of my psychological and physical state by considering it within the framework of Weltschmerz.

The survey

The DCoP conference presented itself as an opportunity to directly ask my peers and colleagues about their experience of Weltschmerz and gain a different type of 'data' for my research. I wanted to capture breadth of understandings of Weltschmerz to compliment the depth of my own experience of Weltschmerz. From those who attended the talk, in person and online, 24 people chose to complete the survey. Two people stated that they had not experienced Weltschmerz whilst the remaining 22 reported that they had. Those who completed the survey and responded that they had experienced Weltschmerz chose to provide alternative words or phrases that allude to their experience. These are displayed in the word cloud (Figure 2) below. Duplicate of words are presented separately, with the only repeating words being '*confused/confusion', pain/painful', 'stuck/stuckiness'* and '*world-weary/weary'*.

Figure 2: Weltschmerz word cloud



From the wide selection of terms presented above, I believe it is clear to say that there is no direct translation for the concept of Weltschmerz or tautological word in English (Vilinbakhova & Escandell-Vidal, 2019). Weltschmerz is not a simple concept to capture, and individual experiences help to shape each person's view on the concept. The word 'me' nuzzled into the middle of the word cloud eluded me the first few times I reviewed it. Words like 'annihilation', 'grief', 'humans-doomed' and 'despairing' grabbed my attention and stood out to me as particularly powerful, encouraging me to try them on for size to see how well they fit with my understanding. However, the two-letter word 'me' felt the most fulfilling and most congruent with my introspective processing of Weltschmerz. Interestingly, the word 'me' isn't an affect in itself but does highlight the freedom and flexibility to consider all affects that I experience in relation to Weltschmerz.

Whilst most of the words above could be considered terms relating to negative states of mind or experiences, there are five which could be interpreted to have a positive connotation. These words are '*belonging', 'community', 'moving', 'powerful'* and *'connection'*. 3 out of the 5 referenced being in relation to others, part of a collective. Perhaps suggesting a sense of camaraderie or the recognition that we are all intimately connected at a deep psychological level (Jung, 1968a). Reading these words, I am struck by the sense that to feel Weltschmerz is to be human. The remaining two out of the five words, moving and powerful, strike me as finding momentum or strength within the concept. I am left with wonderings about what these individuals may have been building momentum towards, with fantasies about my talk inspiring a connection between social injustice and taking action towards social change (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010).

Interestingly, others abandoned the English language all together. Instead, calling upon other languages to find words that fit their experience. Such as, 'toska', a Russian word that directly translates to 'yearning' and implies that something is desired without knowing exactly what that something is but that this something cannot be attained (Azadovsky, 2020). The Portuguese word 'saudade' was suggested, which again doesn't fully translate to English but describes as a feeling of longing for something loved and lost (Bell, 2014). The Scottish word 'dreich' – often used to describe the wearisome dull and gloomy Scottish weather (BBC News,

2019) – and phrase ‘sair hearted’ – referring to a sore or painfully heavy heart (Kynoch, 2019) were also suggested as possibilities. This reinforces my initial research spark that English lacks a term that adequately captures the sense of disappointment, scepticism, woefulness with associated feelings of despondency, anger and pain that Weltschmerz indicates.

The question

Thomas formulates a question in his thoughts; is it even possible to experience a term that is born out of historical and generational experiences of another culture? Whilst semantic differences in language may be passed between cultures, it is suggested that emotional differences tend not to be (Perlovsky, 2009). I query whether this is because we are more used to incorporating everyday words from other languages, such as café (French), glitch (Yiddish) and patio (Spanish) (Sitzman, 2023), rather than consider differences in emotion between culture which is an entirely different ask. However, Perlovsky (2009) develops a ‘Bhartrihari–Humboldt–Nietzsche–Sapir–Whorf hypothesis’ to argue that emotions may have a greater impact on culture than more conceptual components. This may suggest that the British rhetoric surrounding mental health, which is anxiety and depression centric (Baker & Kirk-Wade, 2023; Mental Health Foundation, 2023), informs public representations of mental health as seen in the arts for example. The TV series *Normal People* (Rooney et al., 2020) and *This Way Up* (Bea et al., 2019) coming to mind as depictions of this. Therefore, it is perhaps unsurprising that the UK has been found to report the highest rate of anxiety and depression compared to six other countries surveyed in March 2021, also recognising the additional impact of the Covid-19 pandemic (Distaso et al., 2022). Therefore, the experience that I have come to understand as Weltschmerz may exist but is perhaps split into multiple different names to capture the affect.

According to the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis (Whorf, 1956), the language we use can influence our perception and experience of psychological and emotional states. For example, the way we describe how we feel may directly shape our experience of depression and how we manage it (Smirnova et al., 2018). Gipps (2017) argues that the NHS’s reliance on cognitive therapy for the treatment of depression was founded on Aaron Beck’s disillusionment and misunderstanding of psychoanalytic theory. Whilst recognising that benefits of cognitive therapy for specific concerns, such as anxiety, Gipps maintains that stripping psychoanalytic

language, understanding and therapeutic interventions from depression limits the progress depressed clients may experience. He argues that the purpose of working in the transference is to help clients confront their deep-rooted fears regarding how they would be perceived if they were to genuinely embrace their authentic emotions. This process creates an opportunity for a genuine change of perspective, allowing them to break free from depressive thinking patterns and actively engage in the experiential healing, acceptance, and integration of previously unconscious emotional experiences. Ideally, this transformative process would decrease the reliance on therapeutic techniques like behavioural activation, cognitive challenges, or mindfulness, which are often used to cope with the negative consequences of avoiding these emotional experiences (Gipps, 2017). To experience the affective shift, rather than cognitive shift, as suggested by Gipps (2017), we need to feel, rather than think, our emotions. A keyway to be able to do this is by possessing the appropriate language to effectively express the way we feel. This 'affect labelling' has been found to release pressure on the amygdala (the emotional centre of the brain) and encourage an ability to stay calm and increase functioning (Lieberman et al., 2007). Therefore, understanding the concept and having the term 'Weltschmerz' at hand may actively help people to relieve uncomfortable emotions associated with Weltschmerz.

Since I have incorporated Weltschmerz into my vocabulary, I use less words to explain how I feel in response to existing in a relational world and feel I can more accurately describe my experience. Bion's (1962) concept of "container-contained" explores the internal dynamics and abilities of individuals to transform unconscious thoughts into conscious ones. It emphasizes the process by which we engage with and make sense of our experiences. According to Bion, the primary goal of psychoanalysis is not only to resolve unconscious conflicts but to foster the development of the container-contained relationship. The therapist's role is to create a therapeutic environment that allows for the capacity to process and dream (the container) the thoughts and feelings that come from life (the contained) (Ogden, 2004). By utilising the container-contained framework, I have been able to explore and engage with my Weltschmerz in therapy and through introspection. I have created an internal 'container' to hold the complex affect and 'contained' the thoughts, feelings and experiences associated to my Weltschmerz whilst they have been brought into my awareness. I believe this process to have been deeply profound, leading me towards integration of my

experiences of Weltschmerz and alleviating some of the uncomfortable feelings associated with concerns that contribute to my Weltschmerz. To answer Thomas' question, I believe it may be possible to experience a concept that originates from another culture when we are aware of it and able to integrate the emotional contents of the concept.

Chapter 8: Bearing the discomfort of Weltschmerz

My preceding analysis chapters have led me to consider what it looks like to bear the discomfort of Weltschmerz and what may be the 'real world' implications of this. In this chapter, I complete a section from my university's Graduate School 'personal circumstances' form as though I am requesting an extension for my thesis due to experiencing Weltschmerz. Just to be clear, this section of the form is real, and my experience of Weltschmerz is also real, but I did not submit the below for mitigating circumstances.

Section 3. Your circumstances and their impact

3.1 Please provide a brief description of your circumstances. Refer to the PGR personal circumstances guidance notes for further information about circumstances likely to be accepted. If your circumstances are covid-19 related please detail them below as it will affect the evidence you need to support this application (*see section 4*).

I am clutched in the tight grip of Weltschmerz, a debilitating psychological pain produced by a sense of despondency in relation to a realisation that my own undoing is in response to the incongruity and cruelty of the world. The weight of the world's imperfections bears down upon my chest, suffocating me with sorrowful disenchantment. A haunting melancholy engulfs my every thought, as I navigate a reality that falls short of my ideals and leaves me questioning if I had set my sights too high in the first place. I am harrowingly aware of the ceaseless suffering, the injustices that stain the proverbial tablecloth of humanity. Each glimpse of the news pierces my increasingly tender empathy. The suffering of others reverberates throughout my body. Yet, it is not sitting with the pain of others that burdens me. This is something I am accustomed to. I can appreciate the bittersweetness of a wounded soul. It is the profound sense of disconnect, the palpable dissonance between what should be and what is. At least, what I believe should be. I am confronted with the gaping chasm between the boundless potential for goodness and the relentless tide of human fallibility.

In this state of Weltschmerz, I experience a blend of anguish, fear, loss, grief, melancholy, despondency, disappointment, rage, and guilt. Yet the total is different from the sum of their parts as they are not neatly stacked together as varying shades of yellow and blue but integrated into the grungy green of Weltschmerz. The cocktail of emotions combining into an aching torment of my soul which threatens to pour through its windows, exposing the

fragile and fleeting glimmer of innocent hope. Wiped swiftly away with bare cold disillusionment.

3.2 How has your ability to study or meet a milestone deadline been impacted? Please ensure that you state which milestone deadline and when it is due.

Weltschmerz has impacted my ability to study due to:

- Withdrawing into isolation and feeling alienated from society
- Deep despondency, indignation and emotional turmoil
- Existential angst
- Relentless fatigue and sleep disturbances
- Muscle tension and tension headaches
- Heart palpitations and chest pains
- Transient chronic urticaria
- Perioral dermatitis and eczema

I am requesting a suspension of my studies to enable me time to step away from my research, and so also the intensity of my Weltschmerz, to prioritise my well-being.

Chapter 9: Discussion

I have put forward Weltschmerz as an alternative perspective to pathologized understandings of distress, with the aim that fresh insights may be gleaned on what it may mean to exist in a relational and often hostile world. Throughout my analysis I have peeled back affective, narrative, and intersubjective layers as I wrestled with the intricacies of my experience of Weltschmerz. After being intwined with the 'auto' and 'ethno' throughout the research process, I now look to take a step backwards to view a wide angle on my research to consider what my autoethnography may add to the counselling psychology field. In the first part of this chapter, I discuss key points of analytic interest that I have drawn from my analysis in light of theory which has helped me to frame my inquiry. In the second part, I consider the implication for practice and how we may help ourselves and our clients bear the discomfort of Weltschmerz. In the final part of the chapter, I evaluate my autoethnography and offer reflections as I look towards the future of research on Weltschmerz.

Part 1: Discussion of analysis

Throughout my analytic chapters, I grappled with making sense of my experiences of Weltschmerz. In Chapter 5 and to begin my analysis, I introduced the chaotic, messy, and overwhelming onslaught of messages that helped to form my experience of Weltschmerz in a world of pain. I recognised the Covid-19 pandemic as a prominent backdrop to my research and how it became embedded in my understanding of my Weltschmerz. In Chapter 6, I deepened my interrogation of Weltschmerz in the jointly held 'container' (Bion, 1962) of supervision, where the discomfort could be held together. I captured the intersubjective creation of the exploration in its rawest form to show, rather than just tell, the process of trying to better understand the intricacies of my experience of Weltschmerz. In Chapter 7, I looked to shift my perspective on Weltschmerz by stepping into 'Thomas'' shoes as he attended the 2022 DCoP Conference, whilst also considering the view of the current landscape of mental health in the UK. Finally, in Chapter 8, I considered a potential 'real world' implication of bearing the discomfort of Weltschmerz and offer a section from my university's 'personal circumstances' form, completed hypothetically, as though I was requesting an extension for my thesis due to experiencing Weltschmerz. I chose not to accompany the form

with analysis but rather discuss the associated implications below. To discuss my analysis, I have pulled on several threads that have been interlaced throughout my analytic chapters and which fall under three main clusters; the *source of Weltschmerz*, *paradigm shift; deconstructing politicalised distress* and *the dance with distance and proximity.*

The source of Weltschmerz

The source of Weltschmerz has been a thread interwoven throughout my analytic exploration. I considered external locations from which my Weltschmerz may be elicited, such as it being rooted in others and spread via the media. I also contemplated intrapsychic processes that may factor into my experience of Weltschmerz. After being posed a question in Chapter 6 that challenged my thinking around where the boundaries of me and the world lay, this line of inquiry quickly became blurred, and the me/other dichotomy dissolved. In this section I discuss the psychosocial interplay with my Weltschmerz as I tease out locations that help me to understand my experience. Initially, I focus on *public pain* as manifestations of Weltschmerz, and which may be accessed via cultural objects. I then consider whether we are *cut from the same cloth* with Weltschmerz interwoven into our fabric in the form of internalised objects before I discuss the destructive and productive potential of *Weltschmerz in the shadows*.

Public pain

In Chapter 5 and 6, I refer to feeling submerged in media portrayals of painful worldly events that contribute to eliciting my Weltschmerz. Ahmed's (2014) discussion on the contingency of pain may be a useful example to further explicate Seigworth and Gregg's (2010) definition of affect and the relevance to my Weltschmerz. The ecological crisis, the rise to authoritarianisms, social and political movements, can all be referred to as affective events - points of intensity that register on the 'line of variation'. I imagine the line of variation to be like a polygraph reading with the points of intensity making the line peak away from the baseline. The affect underpinning events such as the Black Lives Matter movement or war may be expressed through verbalizable emotions of anger or hatred and reflect *The Cultural Politics of Emotions* (Ahmed, 2014). Ahmed (2014) writes that "the pain of others is continually evoked in public discourse, as that which demands a collective as well as individual

response" (p.20). This may be via explicit expression, for example the depiction of physical injuries that clearly indicate pain, or more indirect messages, such as the narrative that often accompanies media fundraising initiatives for third world countries. Often the real 'subject' of the campaign is the viewer, who is enticed into a relationship with those described by feelings being elicited when faced with another's pain. I, as the audience to this campaign, is engaged in an *encounter*. Subsequently, the pain becomes shared but in a way that allows me to maintain a distance so that the pain remains with the other and my sadness becomes about them (Ahmed, 2014). Pain, and the communication surrounding pain, involves complex power relations. Continuing with the fundraising campaign example, I'm pushed into a position of empowerment, and a *plane of possibility*, where I believe my actions can end others' suffering. What then is the audience or witness to this pain left feeling themselves? I argue that my response is Weltschmerz.

Considering affect in this way led me to question what this 'line' consists of and whether I was being drawn back into an overly intellectual position to try and make sense of my Weltschmerz. I had been toying with the notion of 'soul' in relation to Weltschmerz, yet my preconceived ideas noted a religious connotation to soul that I was unsure how to negotiate in my research. My perspective shifted on reading the first few chapters of Peter Westoby's (2016) *Soul, Community, and Social Change*. In chapter 2, Westoby (2016) fuses James Hillman's 'soul of the world' (1992) with the works of Mary Watkins (2008) to discuss the life-force of the cosmos and a phenomenological leap of faith into a different worldly perspective. Westoby (2016) writes: "Hillman focuses on what he sees as public pain – as manifestations of the world's suffering" (p. 43). The soul of the world is not reduced to subjectivity, rather it is suggested to be organic, free flowing, and becoming in relationship with others but also to 'things' (Westoby, 2016).

These 'things' may be akin to what Giffney (2021) refers to as 'cultural objects'. Giffney (2021) introduces the concept of the "culture breast," which she defines as "a process of relating to and through cultural objects" (p.104). These objects are derived from creative endeavours, such as artworks, and can take various forms, including physical objects (e.g., paintings), the experience of engaging with an object (e.g., viewing a painting), and the internalization of the object into one's psyche (e.g., the emotional resonance evoked by the painting). The act of

engaging with art fosters communication and intersubjectivity, providing a potential location for experiencing Weltschmerz. Understanding our relationships with cultural objects as living and relational entities encourages a shift towards a 'soul of the world' view where we may experience a restored intimacy with the world (Westoby, 2016).

The most prominent cultural objects that elicit my Weltschmerz is the media, particularly the news. However, since researching Weltschmerz I have become more aware of media and cultural objects that speak to my experience of Weltschmerz. For instance, the episode of Grey's Anatomy I mentioned in my analysis as well as artwork that I have viewed. Whist there are numerous pieces of art entitles 'Weltschmerz', I have found that I experience Weltschmerz when viewing Edvard Munch's (1893) *The Scream*, Otto Dix's (1932) Renaissance triptych *The War*, various works by Rembrandt, including *The Storm on the Sea of Galilee* (1633), and contemporary pieces like Sun Yuan and Peng Yu's (2016) *Can't Help Myself*, to name just a few examples. Perhaps I am attuned to the artists' own expression of Weltschmerz communicated through their artwork, or maybe I am projecting my own Weltschmerz onto the canvas. Likewise, certain music elicits Weltschmerz for me. The most literal example is Fish's album aptly titled *Weltschmerz* or the nostalgic track *Where Is the Love*? by the Black Eyed Peas. These experiences possess a transcendent quality, as suggested by Bion, highlighting an 'intra-subjectivity' and an elusive essence that is difficult to label but exists in the affective response elicited by cultural objects (Grotstein, 2000). Therefore, pain displayed publicly, whether via art, the media or another form, may inform my understanding of Weltschmerz and help co-create my experience of it.

Cut from the same cloth

In Chapter 6 *a conversation,* I discuss a question posed to me: where do I end and the world begins? I have spent countless hours pondering this question, many of which sat behind a computer screen but some whilst walking in woodlands and others laying on my psychoanalyst's couch. The amount of time I have sat with this question reveals its significance. It captures something of the essence of Weltschmerz, how it may be intimately interwoven in the very fabric of my being and experienced, initially at least, through unconscious processes and internalised representations of objects.

Klein's object relations theory postulates that the development of a healthy sense of self involves traversing two distinct phases or positions: the paranoid-schizoid position and the depressive position (Klein, 1975a). These positions are characterized by the evolving relationship with the breast, the initial object (Klein, 1952; 1975a), which lays the foundation for all future relationships within the unconscious mind of the adult (Giffney, 2021). According to Klein (1952; 1975a), the paranoid-schizoid position represents how infants cope with the overwhelming experience of birth and the subsequent adjustment to the world. In an attempt to bring order to this sensory bombardment, we categorize our experiences as either good or bad. This process aims to pacify the chaos rather than accurately depict reality, leading us to label experiences as entirely good or bad without acknowledging any grey areas in between.

The depressive position, as outlined by Klein (1935), signifies a shift in perspective. It involves moving away from the stark dichotomy of good and bad towards a more nuanced understanding of the complexities and uncertainties of reality. However, due to social stigma, we often find it challenging to openly express this position, and consequently, the world fails to meet our idealized expectations of pure goodness. This expectation, which may have been instilled by another person as symbolized by the nurturing "good breast," becomes internalized through self-criticism and anger when it fails to materialize (Gomez, 1997; Klein, 1935). Weltschmerz can be seen as a manifestation of this ongoing disappointment with the world, initially directed at others but lacking a proper outlet, it transforms into a murky and painful experience that we return to repeatedly. This can lead us to become "stuck" in this position, amplifying susceptibility to Weltschmerz.

Building on Klein's (1975a) differentiation between a "stage" (which we pass through) and a "position" (a lens that influences our perception of events), I propose that Weltschmerz can be understood as a position that we repeatedly revisit. It acts as a lens through which we view the world, shaped by the perspective that objects are not separate from us but an integral part of our identity. In essence, ‘objects are not taken *into* me, they *are* me: we are not just cut from, but rather *are* the same cloth.’ (Kuchuck, 2021, p.20).

Weltschmerz in the shadows

Throughout my analysis, I delve into the notion of Weltschmerz and its presence within the mindset of a global community, as well as how it can be represented and communicated. In

Chapter 6, I explore this concept more explicitly by drawing upon Jung's (1968b) concept of archetypes. The shadow archetype was proposed by Jung to stand alongside the ego to comprise our identity. The shadow refers to the hidden components of our personality, those which may be considered repressed and entrenched in guilt. When the shadow is not recognised it may become the root of interpersonal or group conflict, fuelling prejudice that is divisive and which can underpin anything from a bicker between friends to a full-scale war. Similar to the personal and figurative existence of the mother archetype, the shadow archetype also encompasses a collective shadow that embodies shared values (Jung, 1968a; 1968b). For example, universally held values include abhorrence towards murder or sexual assault of a minor. When we witness numerous transgressive acts that activate a universally recognized archetype, I argue that it is reasonable to suggest a universal response in the form of Weltschmerz. Although contemplating subjects such as paedophilia or murder may be uncomfortable, we will encounter such subjects in one form or another throughout our lives, creating an internal understanding of their existence. In a similar way, as mentioned in *a conversation*, we do not like to think of ourselves as driven by a death instinct or that we, as people, can be capable of such heinous acts.

Yet the shadow holds significant potential. Denying the shadow elements within our identity may result in a sense of personal deprivation and hinder our access to the archetypal energy that drives personal growth (Jung, 1968a; 1968b). By denying or suppressing affects like anger or guilt, which may contribute to Weltschmerz and reside within the shadow, we deprive ourselves of opportunities to become more embodied and attuned to our needs. When archetypes are activated, we project our own destructive nature (as with the mother archetype) onto the collective unconscious as the faceless emblematic psyche that can absorb the darkest of our shadows (Jung, 1968b). But these projections – the bits of us we tried to rid ourselves of and avoid the persecutory feelings – are re-absorbed via projective identification (Klein, 1975a). As we re-internalise what was deemed too shameful to accept as our own, we may also take in the projections of others. Therefore, conceivably encompassed within the archetypes of death, the mother and the shadow are the collectively created symbolisation of Weltschmerz.

Paradigm shift: deconstructing politicalised distress

'Mental health' has been constructed within a neo-liberal take on individualism, with the help of psy- professions subservient to capitalism (Parker et al., 1995). I find it useful to draw upon a community psychology lens to consider Weltschmerz, for example, psycho-political concepts of mental health are centralised (Angelique et al., 2013) which feels increasingly prevalent. Encouraging individualism and reinforcing asymmetrical power relations with a negative impact on mental health (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010) was evidenced throughout the pandemic and the world today and will be further discussed throughout this section. I will consider the *archetypal roots of neuroses* as a potential framework for understanding Weltschmerz before I revisit Chapter 8 of my analysis to demonstrate how society may be *governing the soul of the world,* constraining our understanding and expression of Weltschmerz.

The abundance of research that has been conducted on racial inequalities linked to increased hospitalisation and death rates during the pandemic (Gaynor & Wilson, 2020; Laurencin & McClinton, 2020; Moore, et al 2020; Pirtle, 2020; Poteat et al., 2020) show how multiple social systems interact to produce and maintain complex inequalities that are rooted in systemic racism. Whilst Republicans in the US are fighting for what they believe is protection of life, those that oppose are taking to the streets in protest of their basic human rights being taken away. Both sides may be argued to be disillusioned (Jones & O'Donnell, 2017) with the state of the world as we know it and feel the need to act. Both right and left political persuasions may be said to have experienced the pessimistic worldview synonymous with Weltschmerz and have chosen to do something, highlighting Weltschmerz as a driver of community action.

The precedence has already been set for models of mental health that consider the productive side of common concerns. For example, Gut's (1982) universal depression model positions depression as an adaptive response when faced with a situation where an individual perceives their efforts as failing. Productive depression, as proposed by Gut (1982), enables a greater perspective to be gained on a given circumstance along with a greater ability to problem solve and find meaning within the depressive experience. Weltschmerz adds to the notion of 'radical honesty' (Feltham, 2016) and considers the worldview that Weltschmerz alludes to, whilst also considering an alternative understanding of sadness that puzzles. In

much the same way Eneman et al., (2016) argue that when hopelessness and desperation are accompanied by 'taedium vitae' (weariness of life) it is not useful to diagnose the client with depression, I suggest that it is not useful to diagnose someone with depression who is actually experiencing Weltschmerz. Therefore, an implication of this research is to discourage practitioners from reducing Weltschmerz to a single predefined 'illness' and to encourage the use of language which does not look to medicalise mental health but recognise distress as a difficult but normal response to existing within a relational world.

Archetypal roots of neuroses

It is worth noting that Jung did not focus on neurosis in his work; instead, he believed that addressing numinous experiences was key to alleviating pathology. I propose that Weltschmerz could build upon Jung's ideas and offer an alternative framework for addressing distress and reconnecting with a sense of belonging to something greater. On reading 'The Concept of the Collective Unconscious' (Jung, 1968b), I am almost comforted in the knowledge that such a great thinker underwent somewhat relatable life experiences, yet the irony is palpable. Jung speaks, in what I image to be an exasperated tone:

> '*If thirty years ago anyone had dared to predict that our psychological development was tending towards a revival of the medieval persecutions of the Jews, that Europe would again tremble before the Roman fasces and the tramp of legions, that people would once more give the Roman salute, as two thousand years ago, and that instead of the Christian Cross an archaic swastika would lure onward millions of warriors ready for death— why, that man would have been hooted at as a mystical fool. And today? Surprising as it may seem, all this absurdity is a horrible reality. Private life, private aetiologies, and private neuroses have become almost a fiction in the world of today*.' (p.48).

And today? It is sad to reflect on how this statement is as relevant today as it was back then, with wars, conflicts and clashes spread throughout the globe. The most recent (at time of writing) being Putin's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Jung's depiction of war exemplifies how those who have died remain with us and questions 'what is the fate of great nations but a summation of the psychic changes in individuals?' (p.47). Jung (1968b) argued

that neuroses often have roots in the social, rather than entirely personal, and so must also be archetypal in nature. The forces obscured within archetypes may be activated by circumstance, such as war, although Jung (1968b) recognised that there are likely as many archetypes as there are repetitive recognisable circumstances. Neurosis is now an outdated term, after the neurosis category was eliminated from the DSM in 1980. This was following a review which effectively disassembled neurosis and reassigned its elements under different diagnostic categories such as anxiety disorders (Crocq, 2017), which are still used today. Whilst neurosis was often used to signify poor social adjustment Jung (1968b) emphasised that his approach to neurosis considered individuals to be well adjusted by societal standards but disturbed by existential concerns and powers beyond individual control. To my mind, 'anxiety disorders' do not capture this view of neurosis put forward by Jung, whereas Weltschmerz more readily aligns with a collectively derived existential concern.

Governing the soul of the world

The title of this section is inspired by Rose's (1999) *Governing the Soul* and Westoby's (2016) chapter *Hillman's 'Soul of the world'*. Oppression may be experienced in the throes of modern society, including extensive work hours, often whilst under the guise of a fantasy to seek happiness through good fortune. However, 'fortune' has been tainted by a society driven by economic and aesthetic 'successes'. The true cost of which is interiorisation or soul (Westoby, 2016). I look to use the hypothetical 'personal circumstances' form completed in Chapter 8 to demonstrate the sociopolitical and bureaucratic impact on mainstream conceptualisations of distress which are costing us soul. In my experience, this has left me feeling that my distress, in the form of Weltschmerz, is unrecognised and devalued. I question from where these 'mainstream conceptualisations' of distress have arisen and discuss the juxtaposition with Weltschmerz as a less recognised state.

In Chapter 8 and the 'personal circumstances' form, I am arguing that my experiences associated with Weltschmerz makes it impossible to sit for any length of time behind a computer screen or even pick up a book to engage with in a meaningful way. Weltschmerz floods in through my phone, TV, books, laptops and other people – the tools that enable me to learn as a trainee and the sources of information I need to study Weltschmerz. As a trainee therapist, I am pained by my need to step away from – hide – from the very topic I need to

explore in depth. Yet, my desire to retreat and look away from Weltschmerz feels vital for my health but a hindrance for my research. It is very unlikely that the hypothetical 'personal circumstances' form presented in Chapter 8 would be accepted for a research extension. Upon reviewing the UWE Bristol guidance on personal circumstances (available here under the 'late personal circumstances' section), the eligibility criteria only mentions mental health indirectly in the context of acceptable evidence for an illness, which requires "medical certification" in the form of a letter from a counselling practitioner. This reference to "illness" and "medical certification" firmly situates discourse within a medicalized framework of mental health (Douglas, 2010). The section in the guidance that outlines what is *not* considered eligible for personal circumstances, however, contains direct references to mental distress. It includes "non-serious domestic or personal disruptions" such as 'normal' job pressure or moving house and "normal examination stress or anxiety". The recurring use of the word "normal" raises the question of individual differences in stress response and the variability of stress levels experienced by different individuals in similar situations (Chan, 1977). This concept is not new, as researchers have developed perception-driven perspectives on stress and reactions based on personality constructs like learned helplessness and anxiety. These perspectives acknowledge the impact of person-environment interactions in explaining diverse responses to stress (Chan, 1977). This prompts me to question what constitutes 'normal' levels of stress and anxiety as mentioned in the guidance, and who determines these standards?

Governing the soul (Rose, 1999) looks to tackle this question and refers to the influence the sociopolitical sphere has on shaping the private self. The current concept of medicalised mental health arose from the mental hygiene movement at the start of the twentieth century and has increasingly evolved into a political and ideological movement (Rose, 1999). The 'self' has become the focus of Western politics, with individualism central to the ideological milieu. But rather than this narrative being created from a genuine ethical consideration that sought an inclusive dialectic for distress, it was manufactured from sociopolitical policies that benefitted from a premeditated and universal narrative of mental health. This narrative has become embedded in the way we often perceive distress as it is championed by governmental institutions, such as the NHS (Rose, 1999) and government divisions such as the Department of Health and Social Care which fund mental health guidelines. The NICE guidelines (2023) are

often cited as the ‘experts in evidence-based best practice’ for health care in the UK and provided guidance on a vast range of mental health concerns and how they ‘should’ be recognised and treated. Notably but unsurprisingly, Weltschmerz is not recognised by the NICE Guidelines. The medical conceptualisation of mental health is reflected in the ‘personal circumstances’ form which leaves little room for the recognition of alternative perspectives on distress, such as Weltschmerz.

Clearly, the ideas of medicalised mental health have seeped into educational organisations and impacts on an operational level (Rose, 1999). Note that I refer to educational ‘organisations’ due to the impact of capitalism on the commercialisation and commodification of education (Gibbons, 2018; Klees, 2017; Parker, 2022) which increasingly sees universities echo the hierarchical structures found in the private sector and stringent management ‘control systems’ (Parker, 2022). Systems that threaten the integrity of universities primary missions – teaching, scholarship, and research – by insisting on almost insurmountable bureaucracy under the guise of “accountability, efficiency and impartiality” (Husain, 2022, p.1869). The ‘personal circumstances’ form and guidance does not read as impartial to me; it reads as influenced by the same metrics that motivate universities to attracts students and funders. Metrics that are devised by marketisation and policies that protect the organisation from legal challenges (Husain, 2022) or the possibility of fees going unpaid. The form may indicate the university’s reluctance to recognise the extent of distress that is not understood as pathology, and therefore measurable or contained by wider society and governmental agendas.

Foucault's (1977) perspective of ‘governmentality’ prompts us to examine the discourse that positions individuals within neoliberal society, shaping them to discipline and govern themselves. It also brings attention to the ‘macro technologies’ employed by organisations to promote neoliberal agendas. Consequently, behaviours and thoughts that align with market demands are normalised, while deviations from these norms are pathologized or labelled as deviant (Cosgrove & Karter, 2018; Foucault, 1991). In his examination of ‘governmentality,’ Foucault (1977) explored how governance is conceptualized and actualized. In his 1977-78 lectures, he introduced the concept of "biopower" to address the ‘how’ of power. Biopower refers to the regulation of human life through the manipulation of biological factors as a

political strategy to govern populations and impact individuals. On a global scale, the restrictions on individuals' access to safe healthcare, as witnessed worldwide in relation to issues like abortion rights, exemplify the political manipulation of birth rates and autonomy. At a university level, this may be seen through the bureaucracy, such as the 'personal circumstances' form that impacts students on an operational level. Aligning with the principles of counselling psychology and aiming to de-pathologize those who deviate, Weltschmerz emerges as a potentially normal response to the neoliberal society. However, there is no 'box' for that on a 'personal circumstances' form. Weltschmerz represents my response to a society that attempts to govern the soul of the world and consequently creates psychological distance for those living within it.

The dance with distance and proximity

Throughout my analysis I have toyed back and forth between pushing Weltschmerz away, almost holding it at arm's length to rotate and examine from every angle, and pulling it close to sit with and feel. In the process of pushing away is where I recognise my draw to intellectualise to understand Weltschmerz theoretically and as a defence tactic to avoid always experiencing the intensity of Weltschmerz. In the process of pulling closer is where I try to show how I experience Weltschmerz. In this section I will draw out this tussle more explicitly as I attempt to capture the dance between distance and proximity in my experience of Weltschmerz.

Distance

There have been many studies that have investigated the consequences of isolation in response to the pandemic (see Bland et al, 2020; Pai & Vella, 2022; Pietrabissa & Simpson, 2020), many of which highlight an increase of anxiety and depression, particularly for more vulnerable populations (Armitage & Nellums, 2020). Whilst I too have experienced distance, I did not foreshadow it being a central facet of my experience of Weltschmerz. The Construal-Level Theory (CLT) posits that psychological distance, with social, spatial, temporal, and hypothetical dimensions, is linked to our response to events (Liberman & Trope, 2003). To connect with others' perspectives or envision alternative possibilities, we navigate

psychological distance by forming abstract mental representations of distant objects (Trope & Liberman, 2010). In essence, we develop ways to interpret the world and understand others' actions. When an event or object is psychologically distant, our internal representation of it becomes more abstract (high-level construal), focusing on the object as a whole. Conversely, when it is perceived as psychologically closer, our depiction becomes more concrete (low-level construal) and detail-oriented (Trope & Liberman, 2010).

During times of social distancing, the physical spatial dimension of distance is prominent, and we may become more inclined to form abstract representations of people we were close to in lieu of having their physical presents (Bowen, 2021). The hypothetical dimension of psychological distance pertains to the likelihood of an event or object occurring (Trope & Liberman, 2010). Throughout the pandemic, with uncertainties prevailing, we may have grown accustomed to living with ambiguity. However, ongoing developments worldwide prevent us from gaining a sense of confidence in what the future holds. For instance, climate change remains a significant concern, but misconceptions regarding predictive information often leads people to inaccurately assess the likelihood of its occurrence and place the concern at a temporal distance. When engaging in future-oriented interpretations, the severity of concern tends to increase (Maiella, 2020). Therefore, if I perceive greater psychological distance across all dimensions, I may adopt a zoomed-out perspective, enabling me to see the multiple facets of Weltschmerz and thus experience it, rather than focusing solely on one component labelled as "grief," for example. However, if I perceive Weltschmerz as more distant from my current position, my representation of it will be more abstract and intangible. I am more likely to perceive Weltschmerz in a concrete manner when it feels psychologically close.

Proximity

As discussed in Chapter 5 and throughout my research, I have found it undeniable that suffering continues to prevail on a global scale. Witnessing this suffering, whether through direct contact with those who have experienced trauma, exposure to traumatic content, or observing cruel interactions between individuals (Cieslak et al., 2013), has been referred to as secondary trauma. This can lead to posttraumatic stress symptoms resulting from indirect exposure to traumatic material (van der Merwe & Hunt, 2019). Consequently, the perceived

distance between trauma being "out there" and "in here" diminishes. Literature on secondary trauma tends to focus on the experiences of professionals whose occupations expose them vicariously to trauma. However, the increased media coverage of the pandemic and the behavioural shift towards consuming more news, as discussed earlier, suggests that people may have experienced indirect trauma as if they had directly witnessed the events themselves (Bride et al., 2004). For example, they may exhibit symptoms associated with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), such as avoidance, hyperarousal, or re-experiencing of the event (Prekazi et al., 2021).

The recognition of pandemic trauma, a collective trauma that has shifted our understanding of trauma from an individual level to a societal level, is suggested to permeate collective memory (Steiner, 2023). Collective trauma manifests as a noticeable shift in social dynamics, but its locus is difficult to pinpoint due to its ongoing and fragmented nature within these dynamics. It can be utilized to shape national narratives and justify controversial policies, causing secondary trauma for individuals initially removed from the traumatic event (Steiner, 2023). Steiner (2023) highlights the lack of governmental measures to address the collective trauma caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. While governments have focused on job retention and stabilizing the labour market, they have not provided avenues for emotional expression or encouraged public acknowledgment of negative emotions. Perhaps this is for the best as I am not arguing for further governing of the soul of the world. Rather, as these experiences and Weltschmerz have become closer in proximity, and drawing upon my experience at Glastonbury Festival, I am advocating for further liminal spaces where communitas can thrive and provide the context for collective emotional expression and processing (Turner, 2017).

The dance

The process of researching with Weltschmerz has offered me a concept to better understand my response to the suffering of others and a word that helps me communicate this. It has also encouraged me to question my preconceived ideas about suffering, as something entirely negative with little purpose and to be avoided, to appreciating that suffering may play a fundamental role in life. The prevailing discourse, particularly in positive psychology, often leans toward the idea that suffering should be eliminated to experience a better life (Simons

& Baldwin, 2021; Hofmann, 2022). Therapeutic goals typically revolve around employing coping mechanisms to alleviate symptoms associated with suffering (Bolier et al., 2013; Kaftanski & Hanson, 2022). Challenging this notion, Kaftanski and Hanson (2022) advocate for an "integrated conceptualization of well-being" that recognizes the significance of "negative" emotions for a rich and fulfilling life. Their model aligns with the belief that suffering does not necessarily indicate pathology (Wong & Bowers, 2018; Kaftanski & Hanson, 2022) and that it can possess beneficial qualities (Kaftanski & Hanson, 2022).Viktor Frankl, a psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor, drew upon his own experiences of suffering to suggest that "to live is to suffer, to survive is to find meaning in the suffering" (Frankl, 1985, p. 11). In his book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, Frankl (1985) argues that suffering can serve a purpose in our lives by providing opportunities for growth and transformation. He suggests that it is not the experience of suffering itself that is paramount, but rather how we choose to respond to it. Therefore, suffering, including Weltschmerz, has the potential to prompt re-evaluation of our identities and stimulate personal growth, authenticity, and a deeper sense of meaning in life (Kaftanski & Hanson, 2022). This has been my experience during the pandemic where I have struggled with the intensity of my Weltschmerz but can also recognise an increased sense of meaning in the suffering.

Part 2: How can we help ourselves and our clients bear the discomfort of Weltschmerz?

The existential-phenomenological and humanistic foundations of counselling psychology advocate for a holistic understanding of human existence (Woolfe, Dryden & Strawbridge, 2007). Therefore, a deeper understanding of Weltschmerz may greatly support therapeutic practice in several ways. To discuss this, I will firstly consider working with Weltschmerz in the therapeutic relationship. Key components of my core training as a Counselling Psychologist include psychodynamic and cognitive behaviour therapies. As such, I will consider working with Weltschmerz with both modalities. Finally, I will also discuss a soulful community approach to working with Weltschmerz.

Working with Weltschmerz in the therapeutic relationship

“A psychotherapist’s ability to respond to a patient’s negative affect without flinching is a key aspect, sometimes *the* key aspect, of conducting successful psychotherapy, independent of

modality" (Markowitz & Milrod, 2011, p.124). Many clients fear their own emotions and view them as dangerous or undesirable. It is essential for therapists to respond with empathy and composure to enable clients to express their feelings, understand them, and distance themselves from the emotional intensity. The therapist serves as a support and role model, demonstrating that tolerating and verbalizing emotions can reduce their negative impact and help clients gain control over them. Sharing negative emotions with clients shows empathy, while avoiding or changing the subject may inadvertently reinforce the idea that the emotions are indeed dangerous and should be avoided (Markowitz & Milrod, 2011). This shows the significance of effectively working with negative affects in therapy. However, with less familiar states such as Weltschmerz, this begs the question of how it may be currently worked with in sessions if client and therapist experiences of Weltschmerz go unrecognised. A hallmark of 'good' therapy is client progression from speaking about feelings generally to more in-depth descriptions of an affect which they can sit with, however briefly (Markowitz & Milrod, 2011). To support and model this with Weltschmerz, it may be useful for therapists to engage in self-reflection with their own experiences of Weltschmerz.

By allowing ourselves to sit with world pain and engaging in personal reflection on the concept of Weltschmerz, we can appreciate its impact on us as therapists. Just as we are encouraged to reflect on affective concepts during our training, examining our stance on Weltschmerz promotes awareness of our own emotional responses within the context of our existing relational world and how this may influence our therapeutic presence and ability to 'mentalise' (Fonagy & Target, 1997) client experience. Self-awareness significantly impacts our ability to utilize appropriate self-disclosure in sessions, foster a therapeutic bond, and develop authentic relationships with our clients (Clarkson, 2003). If Weltschmerz is recognized within the therapy room, we can then explore how to work with it or what to do with it. Much in the same way as how the pain associated with guilt enables a renewed capability for reparation (Gomez, 1997), the pain of Weltschmerz may give rise to the same increased capacity for restitution. We learn from an early age that love has the power to repair while anger can destroy (Gomez, 1997; Klein, 1975b), and so we can harness the power of relationships to heal and grow.

The non-dual intersubjective way of conceiving 'truth' in counselling psychology encourages the development of an ethical power balance within the therapeutic relationship (Ryde, 2009). This enables affective experiences, such as Weltschmerz, to be explored whilst also providing space for new therapist-client experiences (Spinelli, 2007). Projective identification is an invaluable tool within the therapeutic relationship, allowing clients to non-verbally communicate their unbearable experiences for the therapist to viscerally experience. This phenomenon forms the foundation of the counter-transference relationship and facilitates deep empathy (Richmond, 2004). Working with such a largely unrecognised concept means that clients may struggle to articulate it, yet they may be eager to rid themselves of the unnamed painful experience. This may involve the client directing the negative affect towards the therapist. In this case, the therapist needs to recognise what is happening in the countertransference relationships, bear the affect, understand the context in which it is taking place and then address it (Markowitz & Milrod, 2011). I propose that Weltschmerz provides us with a term that enables this process to be more accurate and effective when clients are facing the complex multitude of emotions that often inhabit experiences of Weltschmerz. As counselling psychologists, we can strive to identify client projections of Weltschmerz and acknowledge our own identification with them. By processing and returning these experiences to our clients in a more digestible form, they can integrate them more effectively and take steps toward growth.

CBT approach to Weltschmerz

The therapeutic relationship is the consistent corner stone of counselling psychology however, the modality of practice the relationship sits within may depend on practitioner preference or client need (Woolfe, Dryden & Strawbridge, 2007). There is a popular saying, "you are what you eat," but perhaps a 'cognitive' version could be "you are what you say." This concept is echoed in CBT, which emphasizes the relationship between thoughts, behaviours, and emotions (Skinner & Wrycraft, 2014). CBT can focus on identifying and working with 'hot' emotionally charged cognitions and unhelpful thinking patterns that lead to distressing emotions or 'maladaptive' behaviours. The idea is that by becoming more aware of these patterns, individuals can develop alterative thoughts to increase helpful things that they tell themselves (Skinner & Wrycraft, 2014). Therefore, cognitive restructuring supported

by effective affect identification and exploration, could be used whilst working with Weltschmerz to identify negative thoughts and beliefs in relation to the world. Thought challenging techniques could be employed to reframe these thoughts into more balanced and self-compassionate alternative perspectives (Skinner & Wrycraft, 2014), that acknowledge the emotional power of cognitions (Markowitz & Milrod, 2011). To deconstruct this idea by highlighting the structural cracks embedded within CBT's central concept, and consider an alternative perspective, it is worth noting a psychanalytic view on the use of language. As an example, we may very briefly consider Jacques Lacan's (1999) notion of the 'symbolic order'.

While CBT highlights the influence of thoughts and self-beliefs on our emotions, often understood through language, Lacan (1999) proposed that language constructs individual and collective realities. Anything that exists beyond language, inexpressible through it, is referred to as the "real" by Lacan. When we use language, we substitute objects with words, effectively removing the objects themselves. This process of symbolization enables communication and understanding among people by establishing shared meanings. Language serves a purpose beyond information transmission; it also addresses the other. However, since language predates the individual, a sense of alienation arises in relation to it. According to Lacan, language constitutes the Symbolic Order, which is universal and exists externally to the individual, embodying the inherent "otherness" of language. This quality of language enables me to establish the individual's experience of alienation within it which may enable the elements of Weltschmerz that involve isolation and distance to be recognised and worked with.

Psychodynamic approach to Weltschmerz

The relational turn in psychoanalysis may position practitioners well to work with clients who resonate with the experience of Weltschmerz. In addition to employing affect theories (e.g., Rogers, Schröder & Scheve, 2013; Seigworth & Gregg, 2010) to work with the emotional aspects of Weltschmerz, object relations theory may be drawn upon to offer valuable insights into how we develop as individuals capable of experiencing Weltschmerz. For instance, clients who have partially resolved paranoid-schizoid anxieties may repress anger or guilt as intolerable and revert to defense mechanisms associated with this developmental stage (Gomez, 1997; Klein, 1975b). Recognizing these defenses within the therapy room can help

clients become more aware of their triggers, and move toward reparation, particularly considering the current global state of affairs that may have contributed to heightened Weltschmerz-related affects like anger and despondency. Another powerful affect highlighted by Kleinian object relations is envy (Klein, 1957). Envy possesses tremendous destructive power. It can drive us to attack the very things we genuinely desire. When powerful symbols become tainted with darkness, our perception of 'badness' in the world intensifies (Klein, 1957). Whether it is through empathizing with the suffering of others (Kohut, 1959), experiencing collective trauma and collective suffering (Eyerman et al., 2011), heightened othering (Rohleder, 2014), or engaging in "us vs. them" dynamics between the envied and the envious, we may experience Weltschmerz when confronted with the confusion of fragmented internal objects intertwined with the messy process of envy. Compounding the impact is the societal shame often associated with envy and jealousy (Wurmser & Jarass, 2011), which may stigmatize engaging with our own envy and the potential Weltschmerz it entails. Consequently, we may feel a desire to avoid acknowledging and confronting our experiences of Weltschmerz due to fear of social judgment. In therapy, this may be experienced as being 'stuck'.

An example of this may be psychoanalyst Leonard Shengold's (2002) reference to becoming 'convinced that feeling the emotional force of some almost philosophical generalisations is central to the understanding of the conflicting motivations of many patients who get deadlocked in long analyses' (p.699). Whilst exploring resistance to psychotherapy, Shengold (2002) illustrates cases via both clinical and literary material including the autobiography of political theorist Leonard Woolf (1960). Shengold (2002) describes Woolf's experience of Weltschmerz as a 'cosmic depressive reaction' (p.718), depicting the immediate physical location of where the reaction took place, the back garden, in some detail. He continues, drawing connections between the dirty back garden and Freudian psychoanalytic concepts: 'Fear and misery, linked with an unconscious primal scene fantasy, were evoked here by the forbidden fruit of the sexual knowledge of good and evil in the enclosed garden that symbolised the mother's genitals' (p.720). What begins with expectations of a flourishing garden ends in anxiety, disappointment, and depression amongst the traumatising symbolic 'primal scene' (Strachey & Freud, 2001) of the back yard. This suggests that drawing upon

psychoanalytic theories that consider the unconscious may prove fruitful to working with Weltschmerz.

Similarly, incorporating Jungian (1968a) concepts can help identify the symbolic representation of Weltschmerz and in doing so enhance recognition and understanding of this experience. The contents of the personal unconscious, represented by the shadow, are intricately intertwined with the archetypal contents of the collective unconscious. When the shadow is brought into consciousness, it also brings along these archetypal elements, exerting a mysterious and powerful influence on the conscious mind (Jung, 1968a). To identify the symbolism of Weltschmerz, we may consider dreams as an example. Jungian psychotherapist Robert Johnson (1989) offers a five-step process for working with dreams. 1) Write the contents of the dream down as soon as possible on waking; 2) Consider possible associations for each dream image and note archetypal motifs; 3) Make connections between symbolic dream imagery and internal experiences; 4) Interpret the dream, highlighting new insights; 5) Perform a ritual to integrate the dreams meaning with experience. In following this Jungian dream analysis, symbolic representation of Weltschmerz may be identified and connection to the numinous may be experienced (Jung, 1963). Working with dreams may also allow for synchronises (Jung, 1991; Cambray, 2009) between dream or unconscious symbolism and the 'real' world, further illuminating collective depths of Weltschmerz. Counselling psychology is well placed to acknowledge the shadow and work with the unconscious and/or repressed elements of Weltschmerz whilst also recognising the context in which these experiences may be taking place.

Working with Weltschmerz in the community

Our globalized and colonised Western culture could be considered 'falling apart' (Westoby, 2016). Westoby is referring to how people are becoming more disillusioned by politics and ideologies such as consumerism, whilst living in a world that actively 'others' people, governs with fear and wonders why there is an endemic of mental health concerns. Westoby suggests that "a holistic perspective is able to see connections between these issues" (p.44). I suggest that counselling psychology can embrace such a perspective however, at a clinical level, therapists need to develop a greater understanding of the mental health concerns experienced in relation to oppression, displacement, and disenfranchisement. For example, a

willingness to engage with the realities of racism and cultural competency, and humility to provide the necessary and effective care to black clients (Kelly et al., 2020; Watson, Turner & Hines, 2020). Drawing upon multi-level analyses of mental health, such as those found within community psychology, enable consideration of how macro systems inform on the concept of Weltschmerz. Therefore, working with Weltschmerz enables a language to be introduced that deters pathologizing distress and encourages exploration of a 'normal' response to living in very adverse circumstances. It may encourage communities who have suffered oppression or marginalisation to speak of the psychological impact of this without defaulting to a medicalised system that was create by and for the 'usual suspects'.

A soulful understanding of community and mental health listens to marginalised voices and differing cultural practices, opens a dialogue that embraces multiple perspectives on social contexts and responds to latent energies. We are encouraged to tussle with our worldviews and question what is included in the dialogue when discussing mental health in the context of community (Westoby, 2016). When we push 'soul' away, hide from it, we are not considering our own suffering in relation to our extensive isolation form the world. Westoby (2016) proposes that we are instead embraced in a melancholic state that grieves global crises. I agree and suggest that perhaps Weltschmerz adds to the conversation, in and out of therapeutic contexts, as a soulful expression of a response to a world shared with others.

Part 3: Evaluation of the research

Originally, my research design saw me weaving a methodological web that I believed would allow me to consider both the socially constructed elements of participants' stories - identified within their story lines, their choice of words and the co-creation of the interview situation - and what I was referring to as the 'physical' elements of Weltschmerz. These physical elements I believed would capture how the physical space where participant's stories took place influenced their understanding of how Weltschmerz may be produced. 'Physical elements' would also speak to the physical pain of the world, the most obvious example at the time being the environmental crisis, and whether or how this also influenced the stories of Weltschmerz I would have been gathering. Whilst I believed that, although complex, this design could have led to an interesting and thorough interrogation of Weltschmerz that may

have given voice to communities more marginalised than my own. However, the theoretical discrepancies in this earlier design – namely the difficulty in trying to research social construction of a concept that doesn't exist in the language of study – felt insurmountable.

Rather, I believe the journey of research design was of benefit as it gave me methodological rigour and sophistication in study design, having considered various methodologies and iterations before settling on autoethnography. Autoethnography is ironically criticised for being too artful on the one hand and too scientific on the other (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011). However, autoethnography holds the capacity to do both and produce research that is theoretically sound and rigorous whilst also being evocative, accessible and engaging (Ellis, 2004; 2009; Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011). I believe this to be a strength of autoethnography however, recognise the precarious balance it requires to feel as though both elements, artfulness and academic robustness, are equally accounted for.

In this autoethnography I am writing into experiences of an abstract concept that sits at the intersection between the self and culture and I am seeking to gain depth of understanding where such concepts as 'objectivity' would be ill-fitting. Writing as a line of inquiry is also championed by a post-qualitative paradigm (St.Pierre, 2014) and enables exploration of the self within culture as a way to investigate complex social phenomena that may otherwise go undetected (Edwards, 2021). Drawing upon conversations with others and cultural objects to write into my experiences of Weltschmerz enables my experience of Weltschmerz to be shared in a way that is more accessible – in some sections - to readers and help to move towards dissolving the dichotomy of academic scholarly over personal common-sense knowledge (Muncey, 2005; Wall, 2006). Rather, 'the aesthetic value and the emotional authenticity of the narrative stand in the foreground' (Schmid, 2019, p.267). However, I recognise this as an ideal, what I was aiming for, rather than what I necessarily achieved. I found the balance between my tendency to intellectualise, enjoying drawing upon theory and desire to explain ideas in a straightforward way surprisingly difficult to juggle. Whilst I believe that my primary desired audience, of Counselling Psychologists, will be able to take something from my research, I fear engagement with such research from outside of the discipline may remain limited. However, I do believe that within the psychology field, this piece may have the potential to reach and resonate with a wider more diverse audience than research that

accumulates to overly complex technical terminology or figures (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011).

I hope that my research may serve as an inspiration for Counselling Psychologists to consider using autoethnography in their own research practices. However, I feel compelled to offer a word of caution to future Counselling Psychologists venturing into complex topics with autoethnography. This process entails a delicate balance of give and take. I have delved deeply into my personal experience of a painful affect, within the context of a challenging pandemic and a troubled world. This endeavour has come at a 'cost' in terms of time and emotional investment, as I've had to confront my Weltschmerz head-on. Consequently, there were moments when I had to step away from my research to prioritize self-care and carefully consider what aspects of this personal journey I felt comfortable sharing in my work (Chatham-Carpenter, 2010). I have also been granted some leeway to extend my registration which has provided crucial time for me to focus on self-care, rejuvenate, and return to my research with a fresh perspective. This has enabled me to adopt an 'inside' position and empathize with those who may identify within a community experiencing Weltschmerz (Westoby, 2016). Being part of an autoethnography 'troupe' has been an invaluable source of inspiration and comfort. Through our collective journey of studying and researching, we've embraced getting lost in the autoethnography woods together (Ellis, 2004). I would recommend Counselling Psychologists to engage in autoethnographic research, but I would advise doing it with others.

Looking forward

The increasing discourse surrounding climate change has led to a developing field exploring its negative impact on mental health. Whilst some focus on particular emotions, such as grief (Cunsolo Willox, 2012) and guilt (Mallett, 2012), others discuss multiple issues under the 'eco-anxiety' umbrella (Clayton Whitmore-Williams et al., 2017; Pihkala, 2018). For example, Pihkala (2018) argues that widespread apathy masks the deep-rooted feeling of eco-anxiety and that concerns surrounding the meaning of a limited existence impact mental well-being. Likewise, the psychoanalyst Harold Searles (1972) suggested that, in the face of environmental crisis, people are hindered by severe apathy largely derived by unconscious

feelings and attitudes. Alongside my previous findings that highlighted apathy as being characteristic of Weltschmerz (Ince, 2017), it may be useful to consider physical components that may elucidate Weltschmerz, such as ecological dimensions. This would enable exploration of how the physical suffering of the world may inform understandings of Weltschmerz. Questions may be posed around whether eco-anxiety is a part of modern-day Weltschmerz or whether we are tapping into the actual pain of our planet, as opposed to being anxious about the impact of climate change on humanity alone.

I have highlighted witnessing and experiencing marginalisation and social injustice to play a significance role in my experience of Weltschmerz. Next steps in researching Weltschmerz could expand upon the intersection of oppressive forces. In their review of Intersectionality Research in Counseling Psychology, Grzanka, Santos and Moradi (2017) warn us of the pitfalls of research that uses 'intersectionality' as a guise to discuss multiple identities rather than a critical framework to interrogate intersecting systemic forms of oppression. As such, this study does not claim to be a piece of intersectionality research, rather the field of intersectionality has been touched upon to support critiques of how multiple social systems interact to produce and maintain complex inequalities, and how these speak to the experience of Weltschmerz. However, I recognise that this research and my view is entrenched in Eurocentric ideas and that to decolonise research practices there is a need to embrace methodologies that are responsive to the experiences and worldview of different communities (Keikelame & Swartz, 2019). Decolonising research involves research practices being shaped by people from diverse and minority cultural backgrounds. It also calls for the historical and social context of the research to not just be acknowledged within the research methodology but to be embedded. Therefore, autoethnography has been suggested to be a potentially decolonising methodology (Pham & Gothberg, 2020). As such, I would encourage further autoethnographies on Weltschmerz to be created from within marginalised, diverse and minority communities.

Chapter 10: Outro

As I write this conclusion, looking back over my research, I am brimming with a tantalising sense of relief for it *finally* being written and a deep sadness that the research process is almost over. At least for now. I have been sitting with Weltschmerz for years, it has become like a source of comfort, like a friend in some ways – always there, always reliable. I now recognise Weltschmerz as absorbed into my identity – I am that person who studies world-pain. That's the thing about approaching research from an autoethnographic perspective, you become entangled, engulfed, in your topic. Perhaps this is the other way around, and we are drawn to study specific topics autoethnographically because we are already consumed by them, and this is what makes us well placed to share our experiences (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Schmid, 2019).

As I've peeled back each affective, narrative, and intersubjective layer of my Weltschmerz I've torn them to pieces to examine them. Imprinted on these pieces I've found the messages of human, animal, and ecological suffering from around the world (Boltanski, 1999; The Guardian, 2023; Nash, 2008), and numerous affects (Ahmed, 2014; Seigworth & Gregg, 2010; Tomkins, 2008). I have felt pain, despondency, melancholy, and an indignation towards existing within an inequitable and marginalising relational world. I have lovingly glued my Weltschmerz back together with the help of others, through intersubjective (Kuchuck, 2021) creations in the form of conversations and dreams which have enabled me to deepen my reflections and consider Weltschmerz as being gifted to me via internalised objects (Klein, 1959) and the collective unconscious (Jung, 1968b).

The timing of this research has felt synchronous (Cambray, 2009) with challenges on a global level. What better time to study Weltschmerz than during a global pandemic? But this has also meant that it has been like staring directly into the sun at times, blinded by witnessing the unfair suffering of others and the world. As I sit here applying copious amount of Vaseline to my perioral dermatitis, I'm left wondering when/if I will return to feeling comfortable in my own skin. I have endured a world of pain, but I have not been in it alone, and therein lies the purpose I find in bearing the discomfort of my Weltschmerz.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Participant Information Sheet and Privacy Notice

Participant Information Sheet

Stories of world pain: a narrative analysis of Bristolians' constructions and productions of Weltschmerz

I would like to invite you to take part in a study about Weltschmerz. The direct translation of the German word Weltschmerz is 'world pain' and although there is not a direct translation of the concept in English, it signifies a feeling of world-weariness that stems from an awareness of world suffering. I am undertaking this research project as part of the Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology at the University of the West of England (UWE), Bristol. Before you decide whether to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being conducted and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully, and discuss it with others if you wish, to ensure your decision to take part in the study is fully informed. Please do not hesitate to contact us if anything is unclear or if you would like more information.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information.

Who is conducting and funding the research?

My name is Amelia Ince and I am a Trainee Counselling Psychologist and the project lead. My Director of Studies is Dr Miltos Hadjiosif, Counselling Psychologists and a Senior Lecturer in Counselling Psychology at UWE Bristol. Please find our contact details below:

Researcher

Amelia Ince: amelia2.ince@live.uwe.ac.uk

Director of Studies

Dr Miltos Hadjiosif: Miltos.Hadjiosif@uwe.ac.uk

What is the purpose of this research?

This study aims to better understand peoples' experiences of Weltschmerz in general and how it is experienced by Bristolians in particular. There is currently a lack of psychological research conducted in English on Weltschmerz. Increased understanding and awareness about the phenomenon of Weltschmerz may assist service providers in a broad range of therapeutic and community settings. The research question this study will investigate is: How do Bristolians construct and produce Weltschmerz? This question has been devised to look at the stories people tell surrounding Weltschmerz and how they are told. To help answers this question I will be holding one-to-one interviews where you will be asked about your

understanding and experience of Weltschmerz, drawing upon your own frame of reference and stories. All personal details and information gathered from interviews will be fully anonymised. The collected data will be analysed, and the final report will be disseminated, for example, it will be made available on the UWE Bristol open-access research repository and will be submitted to journals for publication. The anonymised data may also be used to inform conference papers and/or peer-reviewed academic papers.

Why have I been invited to take part?

You are invited to take part in this research project as a Bristol resident who has a self-identified interest in worldly events. You must be over the age of 18 and have basic conversational fluency in English. I am interested in gaining information about your experience, views and understanding of Weltschmerz and the interviews are an opportunity for you to share these.

Please note that it is up to you to decide whether to take part. If you do decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. However, after your participation in the study you have 30 days to request the withdrawal of your data. This cut-off point is essential to minimise the possible impact of the removal of your data on the ongoing data analysis and write-up of the project. After this point (30 days), it may not be possible to withdraw your data from the study. If you wish to withdraw from the study, please contact Amelia or Miltos.

How will the research be done and what will I have to do?

If you would like to participate in this study, you will be invited to first speak with Amelia over the phone to answer any initial questions you may have and to ensure suitability. If you are happy to proceed, an interview will be arranged either in person or online, depending on social distancing guidelines at the time of interview. Before the interview can take place, a signed copy of the Consent Form must be emailed to Amelia. Each interview will last approximately 60 minutes and you will be expected to discuss your understanding and experiences of Weltschmerz using your own frame of reference and ideas. The interviews will be audio recorded for later transcription and you will be told when the recording is about to begin. Everything you say within the interview and all your personal details will be anonymised. If you choose to withdraw from the study after the interview has taken place, your recording will be deleted. Please see above section for further withdrawal details.

On completion of the interview you will be provided with details of the second stage of the research and invited to take part. The second stage involves completing a solicited diary which captures your experiences of and insight into Weltschmerz over a four-week period (with a minimum of one entry a week). Entries can be made using any medium, from writing to newspaper clippings, drawings and photographs. A follow up conversation will be held on completion of diaries.

By attending the initial interview, you are not obligated to take part in the second stage of the research.

What are the benefits of taking part?

As someone who has experienced Weltschmerz, I found talking about it and researching it very beneficial. It is my hope that you will find some benefit from our conversation. This is an under-researched and under-theorised concept (especially in the English-speaking world) and I hope that my research, through furthering our understanding of Weltschmerz, can also be of benefit to community and counselling psychologists.

What are the potential risks involved in taking part?

I do not foresee or anticipate any significant risk to you in taking part in this study. Due to the sensitive nature of Weltschmerz, there is the potential for the topic to induce psychological stress. If there are any signs of distress or you feel any amount of psychological stress caused by the interview, it can be paused or stopped entirely immediately. You will be reminded that you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without needing to provide a reason. The interview will only proceed if you are happy to do so. If any feeling of distress develops after the interview or you are concerned about any of the issues raised, you are encouraged to contact one of the support services provided below.

What will happen to your information?

All the information we receive from you will be treated in the strictest confidence. The personal information collected in this research project will be processed in accordance to the University's and the Data Protection Act 2018 and General Data Protection Regulation requirements. We will hold your data securely and not make it available to any third party unless permitted or required to do so by law. Your personal information will be used/processed as described on this information sheet.

The personal information that you will be asked to provide is your demographic information and your contact details. All interviews will be audio recorded for later transcription, which will be anonymised. Due to the nature of qualitative analysis, extracts from the interviews may be directly quoted within the research report. All the data you provide will be stored in password-protected computer files under an anonymous identifier and used on a confidential basis. Demographic information, contact details, audio data and the resulting analysed data will be held for as long as it retains research value and then destroyed securely. Audio recordings of interviews will be destroyed once anonymised transcripts have been produced. To ensure anonymity and enable individual participant data to be identified should you wish to withdraw, all interview transcripts will be allocated a code name, which will be saved alongside corresponding participant names in a separate locked file and this file will be deleted after the analysis. Transcripts will also be deleted from UWE OneDrive on completion of the project. Consent forms may be printed to provide hardcopies of the documents and will be stored in a locked filing cabinet, along with any other hardcopy materials and disposed of via UWE's confidential waste. The anonymised data may be made available for further appropriately approved research at the University. Your anonymised data will be analysed together with other interview and file data, and we will ensure that there is no possibility of identification or re-identification from this point.

Where will the findings of the research be published?

The findings from this research may be used in publications in academic journals and also presentations at academic conferences. Your name will never be included in any of these publications, and your data will only be used anonymously.

A copy of the Report will be made available to all research participants if you would like to see it. Key findings may also be shared both within and outside the University of the West of England, Bristol, for example on the University's open-access Research Repository. Anonymous and non-identifying direct quotes may be used for publication and presentation purposes.

Who has ethically approved this research?

The project has been reviewed and approved by the Faculty of Health and Applied Sciences, University of the West of England, Research Ethics Committee. Any comments, questions or complaints about the ethical conduct of this study can be addressed to the Research Ethics Committee at the University of the West of England at:

Researchethics@uwe.ac.uk

What if something goes wrong?

In the unforeseen circumstance that something goes wrong and you would like to talk to someone at the university, in the first instance please contact the Director of Studies on this project.

Sources of support

If the solicited diary process or content discussed in the interview has left you wanting to talk to someone about the thoughts and feelings that have been brought up for you, please do contact a support service. The following services are provided for suggestions.

Samaritans

http://www.samaritans.org/

Samaritans are open 24 hours a day seven days a week. They listen to anything at all that may be upsetting you.

Telephone: 116 123 (Please note that this is a free phone number that you can call at any time and from any phone).

Email: jo@samaritans.org

SANEline

http://www.sane.org.uk/what_we_do/support/helpline

SANEline are open from 4.30pm- 10.30pm seven days a week to offer emotional support and information.

Telephone: 0300 304 7000

Email: support@sane.org.uk

What to do now?

If you would like to take part in the study, please email amelia2.Ince@live.uwe.ac.uk. We will then arrange a convenient time to speak on the phone initially. You will be emailed the Consent Form to complete and return before the interview.

Do you have any further questions?

If you have questions about the research - either now or at some future date - please contact Amelia:

Amelia Ince
Trainee Counselling Psychologist
amelia2.Ince@live.uwe.ac.uk

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this study.

You will be given a copy of this Participant Information Sheet and your signed Consent Form to keep.

Privacy Notice

Purpose of the Privacy Notice

This privacy notice explains how the University of the West of England, Bristol (UWE) collects, manages and uses your personal data before, during and after you participate in the research project; 'Stories of world pain: a narrative analysis of Bristolians' constructions and productions of Weltschmerz'. 'Personal data' means any information relating to an identified or identifiable natural person (the data subject). An 'identifiable natural person' is one who can be identified, directly or indirectly, including by reference to an identifier such as a name, an identification number, location data, an online identifier, or to one or more factors specific to the physical, physiological, genetic, mental, economic, cultural or social identity of that natural person.

This privacy notice adheres to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) principle of transparency. This means it gives information about:

- How and why your data will be used for the research;
- What your rights are under GDPR; and
- How to contact UWE Bristol and the project lead in relation to questions, concerns or exercising your rights regarding the use of your personal data.

This Privacy Notice should be read in conjunction with the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form provided to you before you agree to take part in the research.

Why are we processing your personal data?

UWE Bristol undertakes research under its public function to provide research for the benefit of society. As a data controller we are committed to protecting the privacy and security of your personal data in accordance with the (EU) 2016/679 the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), the Data Protection Act 2018 (or any successor legislation) and any other legislation directly relating to privacy laws that apply (together "the Data Protection Legislation"). General information on Data Protection law is available from the Information Commissioner's Office (https://ico.org.uk/).

How do we use your personal data?

We use your personal data for research with appropriate safeguards in place on the lawful bases of fulfilling tasks in the public interest, and for archiving purposes in the public interest, for scientific or historical research purposes.

We will always tell you about the information we wish to collect from you and how we will use it.

We will not use your personal data for automated decision making about you or for profiling purposes.

Our research is governed by robust policies and procedures and, where human participants are involved, is subject to ethical approval from either UWE Bristol's Faculty or University

Research Ethics Committees. This research has been approved by the Faculty of Health and Applied Science Ethics Committee; the ethics application reference number is: HAS.20.06.191. Please use the email address below to contact the research Ethics Committee for queries, comments or complaints.

The Officer for all Faculty Research Ethics Committee's is Leigh Taylor who can be contacted by email at Leigh.Taylor@uwe.ac.uk.

The research team adhere to the **Ethical guidelines of the British Educational Research Association (and/or the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki, 2013) and the principles of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).**

For more information about UWE Bristol's research ethics approval process please see our Research Ethics webpages at:

www1.uwe.ac.uk/research/researchethics

What data do we collect?

The data we collect will vary from project to project. Researchers will only collect data that is essential for their project. The specific categories of personal data processed are described in the Participant Information Sheet provided to you with this Privacy Notice. The categories of personal data that will be collected include demographic information and contact details.

Who do we share your data with?

We will only share your personal data in accordance with the attached Participant Information Sheet and your Consent.

How do we keep your data secure?

We take a robust approach to protecting your information with secure electronic and physical storage areas for research data with controlled access. If you are participating in a particularly sensitive project UWE Bristol puts into place additional layers of security. UWE Bristol has Cyber Essentials information security certification.

Alongside these technical measures there are comprehensive and effective policies and processes in place to ensure that users and administrators of information are aware of their obligations and responsibilities for the data they have access to. By default, people are only granted access to the information they require to perform their duties. Mandatory data protection and information security training is provided to staff and expert advice available if needed.

How long do we keep your data for?

Your personal data will only be retained for as long as is necessary to fulfil the cited purpose of the research. The length of time we keep your personal data will depend on several factors including the significance of the data, funder requirements, and the nature of the study. Specific details are provided in the attached Participant Information Sheet, on page 3.

Demographic information, contact details, audio data and the resulting analysed data will be held for as long as it retains research value and then destroyed securely. Anonymised data that falls outside the scope of data protection legislation as it contains no identifying or identifiable information may be stored in UWE Bristol's research data archive or another carefully selected appropriate data archive.

Your Rights and how to exercise them

Under the Data Protection legislation you have the following **qualified** rights:

(1) The right to access your personal data held by or on behalf of the University;
(2) The right to rectification if the information is inaccurate or incomplete;
(3) The right to restrict processing and/or erasure of your personal data;
(4) The right to data portability;
(5) The right to object to processing;
(6) The right to object to automated decision making and profiling;
(7) The right to complain to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO).

Please note, however, that some of these rights do not apply when the data is being used for research purposes if appropriate safeguards have been put in place.

We will always respond to concerns or queries you may have. If you wish to exercise your rights or have any other general data protection queries, please contact UWE Bristol's Data Protection Officer (dataprotection@uwe.ac.uk).

If you have any complaints or queries relating to the research in which you are taking part please contact either the research project lead, whose details are in the attached Participant Information Sheet, UWE Bristol's Research Ethics Committees (research.ethics@uwe.ac.uk) or UWE Bristol's research governance manager (Ros.Rouse@uwe.ac.uk)

v.1: This Privacy Notice was issued in April 2019 and will be subject to regular review/update.

Appendix B: Consent Form

Consent Form

Stories of world pain: a narrative analysis of Bristolians' constructions and productions of Weltschmerz

This consent form will have been given to you with the Participant Information Sheet. Please ensure that you have read and understood the information contained in the Participant Information Sheet and asked any questions before you sign this form. If you have any questions please contact a member of the research team, whose details are set out on the Participant Information Sheet.

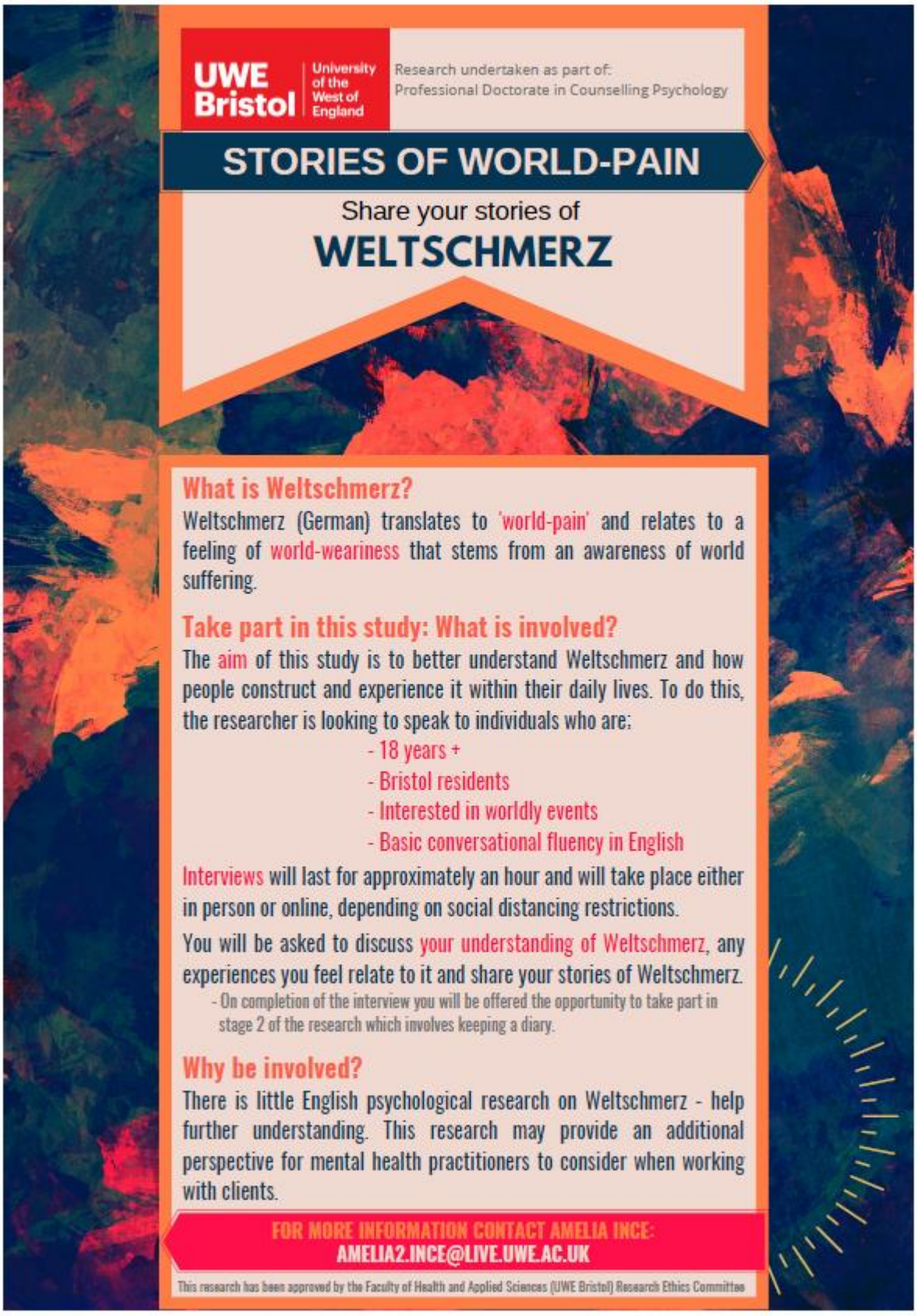
If you are happy to take part in the interview, please sign and date the form. You will be given a copy to keep for your records.

- I have read and understood the information in the Participant Information Sheet which I have been given to read before asked to sign this form;
- I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the study;
- I have had my questions answered satisfactorily by the research team;
- I agree that anonymised quotes may be used in the final Report of this study;
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw up to 30 days after the interview, without giving a reason;
- I agree to take part in the research.

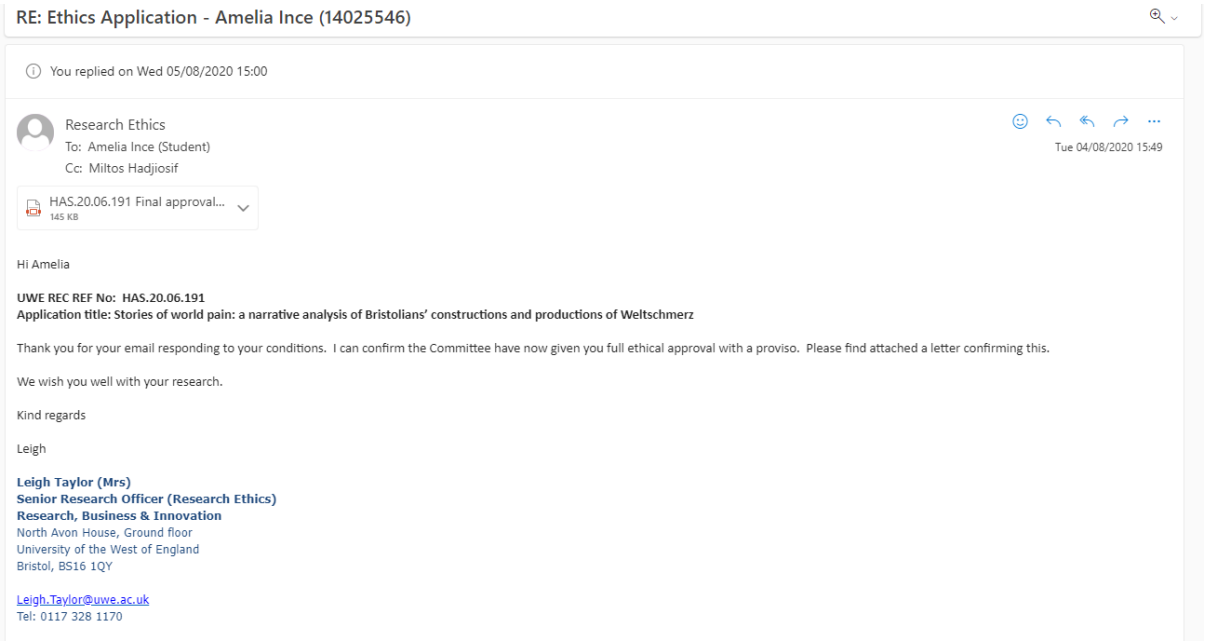
Name (Printed)…….

Signature…….. Date……..

Appendix C: Poster



Appendix D: Ethical approval



RE: Ethics Application - Amelia Ince (14025546)

You replied on Wed 05/08/2020 15:00

Research Ethics
To: Amelia Ince (Student)
Cc: Miltos Hadjiosif
Tue 04/08/2020 15:49

HAS.20.06.191 Final approval...
145 KB

Hi Amelia

UWE REC REF No: HAS.20.06.191
Application title: Stories of world pain: a narrative analysis of Bristolians' constructions and productions of Weltschmerz

Thank you for your email responding to your conditions. I can confirm the Committee have now given you full ethical approval with a proviso. Please find attached a letter confirming this.

We wish you well with your research.

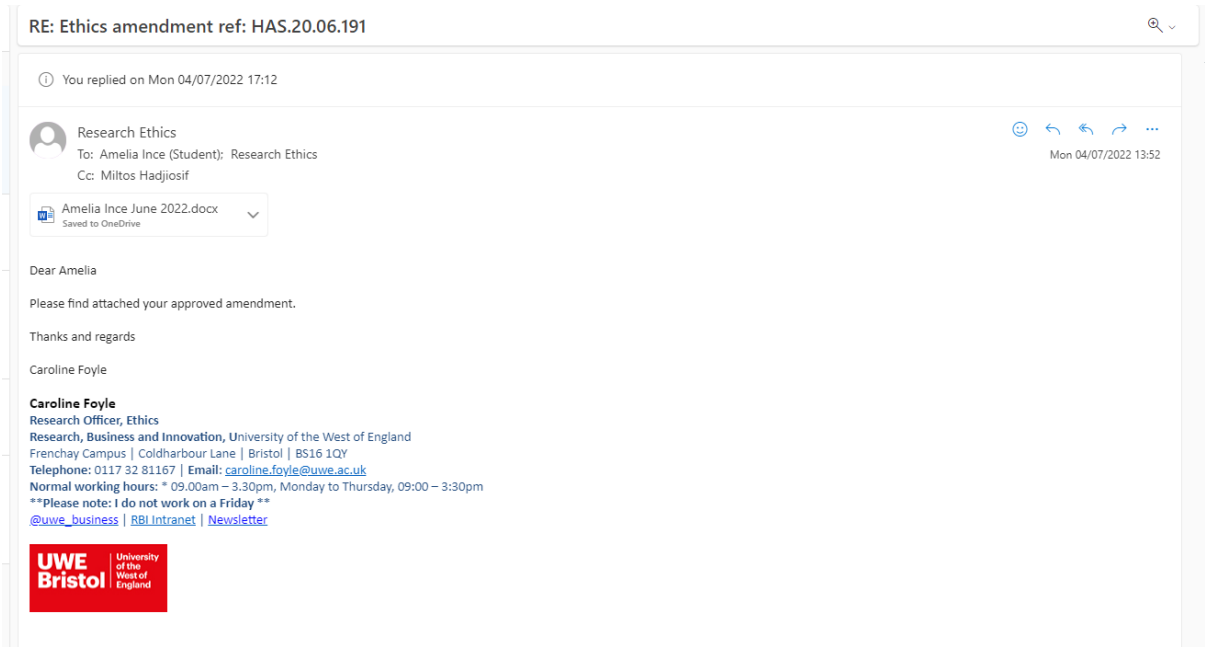
Kind regards

Leigh

Leigh Taylor (Mrs)
Senior Research Officer (Research Ethics)
Research, Business & Innovation
North Avon House, Ground floor
University of the West of England
Bristol, BS16 1QY

Leigh.Taylor@uwe.ac.uk
Tel: 0117 328 1170

Appendix E: Amendments to ethical approval



RE: Ethics amendment ref: HAS.20.06.191

You replied on Mon 04/07/2022 17:12

Research Ethics
To: Amelia Ince (Student); Research Ethics
Cc: Miltos Hadjiosif
Mon 04/07/2022 13:52

Amelia Ince June 2022.docx
Saved to OneDrive

Dear Amelia

Please find attached your approved amendment.

Thanks and regards

Caroline Foyle

Caroline Foyle
Research Officer, Ethics
Research, Business and Innovation, University of the West of England
Frenchay Campus | Coldharbour Lane | Bristol | BS16 1QY
Telephone: 0117 32 81167 | **Email:** caroline.foyle@uwe.ac.uk
Normal working hours: * 09.00am – 3.30pm, Monday to Thursday, 09:00 – 3:30pm
****Please note: I do not work on a Friday ****
@uwe_business | RBI Intranet | Newsletter

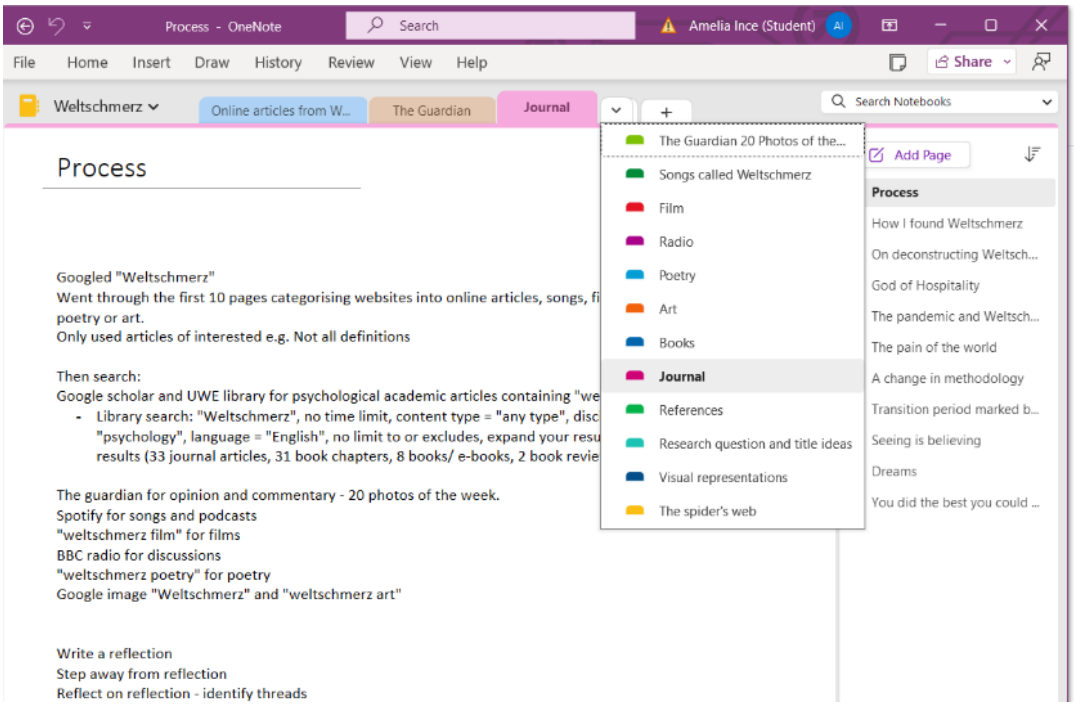
Appendix F: Supporting 'evidence'

Right: Amelia Ince. Middle: Miltos Hadjiosif.

Left: Jen Martin

Hadjiosif, M., Ince, A., & Martin, J. (2022). Autoethnography: Let there be chaos. *Presented at BPS Division of Counselling Psychology Annual Conference, Royal College of Physicians*. London. Retrieved from https://uwe-repository.worktribe.com/output/9746633

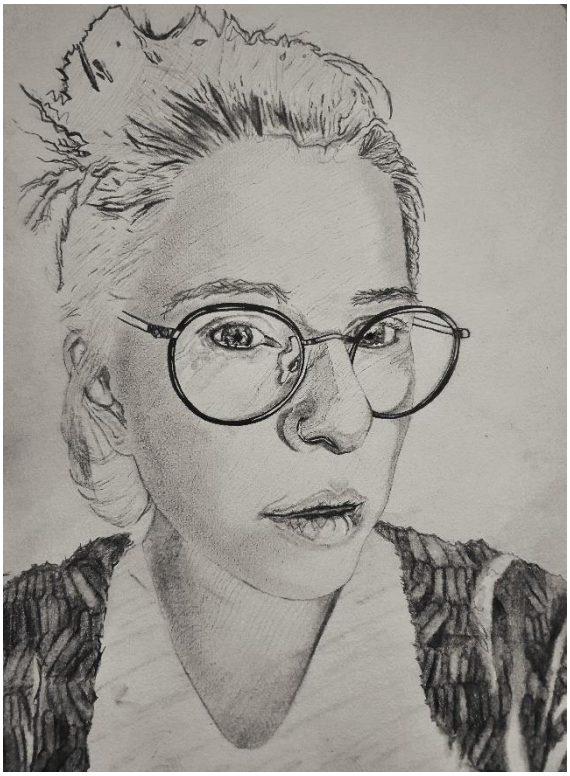
QR code used to survey attendees of the symposium.



Screenshot of OneNote document with accumulation of notes, images, sources and information that helped to inform my reflections on Weltschmerz.

The autoethnography troupe at work.

My journal for reflecting on Weltschmerz and the research process.



Linear self-portrait, capturing a moment of trying to bear the discomfort of Weltschmerz.