The Play of Defences in the Climate and Ecological Emergency:

A Psychosocial Exploration of Therapy and Eco-activism

Trudi Macagnino

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the University of the West of England, Bristol

for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

College of Health, Science and Society, University of the West of England, Bristol

March 2024

word count 90,953

Abstract

Climate psychology is an emerging field of study concerned with the emotional, psychological and social processes that have contributed to the Climate and Ecological Emergency (CEE) and our responses to it. There is a growing interest from the psychological professions in how to work with people presenting with eco-distress together with a growing activist movement concerned with sociopolitical change. Whilst substantial literature exists that theorises the role of unconscious individual defences and cultural factors in our responses, there is little empirical research that demonstrates how such processes might present themselves. This study aims to deepen our understanding of the play of feelings and psychological defences concerned with the CEE in the contexts of therapy and eco-activism.

A psycho-social approach was taken utlising free-association narrative interviews (FANI) and the biographical narrative interview method (BNIM) with therapists, clients and eco-activists. Reflexive thematic analysis was used to identify themes. Findings supported the literature regarding the range of feelings that people experience in relation to the CEE, such as fear, grief, sadness, anger, guilt and powerlessness and that these feelings are defended against through splitting, projection and distancing. The findings demonstrated that through activism these feelings can be transformed into more positive emotions such empowerment, excitement and togetherness. A key finding was the reciprocal splitting of inner/personal concerns from outer/social concerns in the two contexts of therapy and activism. Through social defences against anxiety therapists may avoid exploring the significance of the CEE with their clients, even if clients make side-mentions that could relate to the topic, and activists avoid reflection on how their activism relates to their personal histories.

I argue that therapy has a role in supporting people in living with the CEE but needs to be re-imagined and recrafted as an eco-psychosocial practice that allows space for outer/social concerns. The study offers much needed suggestions for how this could be achieved.

Acknowledgements

I feel incredibly lucky to have had such a wonderful supervision team from UWE, Lita Crociani-Windland, Mat Jones and Nigel Williams. Thank you for your support, encouragement and interest in my project. In particular, Lita as my director of studies has offered invaluable guidance at every step of the journey. Thank you for your calm holding and generosity of spirit.

I would also like to thank my research participants who gave their time and were willing to explore a little beneath-the-surface with me. Thank you for your courage.

My research builds on other authors and practitioners whom I respect greatly and I thank them for pushing the boundaries of our field and recognising our kinship with the more-than-human world.

I would like to thank my colleagues at the Open University for allowing me the time and space to complete this project. Thank you for your encouragement and for covering my work at times.

Finally, but not least, my deepest thanks to my family. My daughters, Rebecca, Fran and Freya are my cheerleaders. Thank you for believing in your Mum and thank you Rebecca for your expert proof reading. You three inspire me every single day.

And to my husband Nick – thank you for your unfailing love, for walking the dog, feeding the chickens, cleaning the house and putting up with my complete distraction whilst working on this project. Thank you for helping me realise my dream. I really couldn't have done it without you.

Glossary of terms

Affect: Describes bodily sensations, or indeterminate psychological experiences without a specific object. These can be conscious or subconscious, such as anxiety.

Agency: The potential or actual ability of individuals to produce an effect or exert influence.

Burn-out: A state of emotional, physical and mental exhaustion.

Climate café: Adapted from the Death Café model, a climate café is a friendly and empathic space where people can gather to safely express difficult feelings about the CEE.

Collective unconscious: A term from Jungian psychoanalysis that refers to a part of the unconscious that is shared by all people, expressed as archetypes and manifesting in dreams, myths and fairy tales.

Compartmentalisation: The capacity to hold contradictory stories or evidence apart, which can contribute to ambivalence and cognitive dissonance (Weintrobe, 2013).

Containment: The term originates from Bion's (1961, 1962) work and refers to the extent to which an experience can be digested and worked through contributing to psychological growth and development.

Defended subject: A person who is "motivated, largely unconsciously, to disguise the meaning of at least some of their feelings and actions" (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000, p. 26).

Denialism: The application of cultural and socially organised denial used for a specific political end (Weintrobe, 2013).

Disavowal: A psychoanalytic term for a defence where reality is accepted but its significance is minimised, a kind of knowing and not knowing at the same time (Weintrobe, 2013).

Ecological self: First coined by the Norwegian environmental philosopher and founder of the deep ecology movement, Arne Naess the term refers to an experience of self which is expansive, relational, wider and deeper than the ego and identifies with all of life not just other humans. '*One experiences oneself to be a genuine part of all life'* (Naess, 1989, p.174)

Ecopsychology: Ecopsychology seeks to examine the emotional and psychological aspects of humans' relationship with the rest of the natural world, particularly the reciprocal effects (Jordan, 2015). A central tenet of ecopsychology is that the more human beings become physically, emotionally, psychologically and spiritually disconnected from nature the more psychological distress we suffer. Correspondingly, the more we are disconnected from nature the more environmental distress the planet suffers (Roszak, Gomes and Kanner, 1995).

Free association: A technique used in psychoanalysis where the patient is encouraged to relate everything that comes to mind freely, in an unstructured and uncensored manner. It is thought that this exposes unconscious defences.

Emotion: Refers to experience that has undergone qualification as it enters into a more discursive level i.e. feelings that can be named and have an object.

Gestalt: In this thesis the term refers to the order or meaning-frame that informs a participant's narrative or story and that the researcher aims to illicit intact.

Grief tending: A process where grief is given space for expression in a group setting. It usually involves ritual and the whole process is held by a facilitator.

Idealisation: A defence mechanism where an object is mentally represented in a perfected form such that it is aggrandized and exalted.

Living with the climate crisis: 'A facilitated group process to help people face our uncertain future and find their way towards action that is personally sustainable' (Living with the climate crisis, 2023, online)

Parallel process: Refers to the way in which dynamics operating within one relationship (e.g. between a therapist and their client) are then mirrored in another relationship (e.g. between the therapist and their supervisor).

Post-Traumatic Stress: A delayed and protracted response to experiencing or witnessing a traumatic event.

Projection: In psychoanalytic terms (from Klein), projection is a form of unconscious defence, in which intolerable feelings, impulses, or thoughts are falsely attributed to other people.

Projective Identification: A psychoanalytic term (from Klein) for an unconscious process whereby a projected part of oneself is ‘inserted’ into another such that the other experiences the disowned part.

Psycho-social: Broadly this refers to an ontological position that sees subjective experience and individual psyches, including unconscious material, as anchored in social and societal collective discursive systems.

Splitting: A psychoanalytic term (from Klein) for the process of cutting off from experiences or information that one finds too threatening, or compartmentalising it away. The splitting of the object into a good object and a bad object is a defence against ambivalence and the anxiety that it generates.

Transference and countertransference: Transference is a psychanalytic term that refers to the “unconscious transferring of other emotionally significant relationships onto therapists by patients”. Counter transference refers to the “therapist’s responses to transference, plus transference of significant relationships onto patient”. (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000, p.27).

The Work That Reconnects (TWTR): An evolving body of experiential group work processes developed in the USA, Europe and Australia in the 1970s onwards by Joanna Macy and colleagues (Macy and Young Brown, 1998).

Contents

List of figures

Chapter 1 – Introduction

1.1 Summary: what the study is about

My project answers the call for further research in the dynamics involved in the affective and emotional responses to the Climate and Ecological Emergency (CEE) made by organisations such as the International Psychanalytical Association (Kress et al., 2015), the Royal College of Psychiatrists (2021) and the American Psychological Association (2022), as well as many other researchers working in the field of climate psychology. In so doing it raises questions regarding the role of therapy for managing eco-distress and I offer recommendations for practice, specifically the need for an eco-psychosocial approach and the linking of inner and outer worlds. As an empirical study it contributes to the theoretical climate psychology literature and provides guidance for the ongoing development of practice for therapists in this field. By exploring activism as another response to the CEE, the study highlights ways in which group processes may be an adjunct to more traditional therapeutic approaches. Employing both a clinical and political lens to the study of our emotional responses to the CEE has created a psycho-social space for a richer understanding to emerge.

The starting assumption is that engaging with the CEE arouses intense and difficult feelings that make it challenging for people to remain engaged with the issue (Gillespie, 2019). This results in conscious and unconscious defences against painful feelings. In this thesis I argue that the psychological and cultural dimensions of responses to the CEE are intrinsic to each other. Individual reflection and political action need to be integrated.

The two contexts of therapy and activism are relevant because talking with others about your feelings and taking some kind of action have come to be considered as antidotes to distress caused by the CEE. For example, on the Welldoing.org website (a therapist-matching service) Kate Graham lists ‘8 Ways to Cope with Eco-Anxiety’ (Graham, 2020). Tip number 2 includes talking to a therapist, tip number 3 suggests joining a climate action group and tip number 7 suggests giving 10% of your time to fighting climate change and biodiversity loss. In a similar article in the Guardian newspaper (Sarner, 2022) engaging in therapy and activism are highlighted as helpful ways to manage the distress caused by awakening to the reality of the CEE.

The practice of talking therapy (counselling, psychotherapy and counselling psychology) is an established approach to helping people manage emotional and psychological difficulties in high income countries. In the 2021 UK census almost 200,000 people classified themselves as either employed or self-employed therapy professionals (Michas, 2022). It is estimated that 40% of GP appointments involve mental health (Mind, 2018) and in 2020-2021 1.46 million referrals were made by GPs to talking therapies, specifically Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) (IAPT Team, NHS Digital, 2021). This obviously does not include people who self-refer to other organisations and to private practitioners. These statistics give an indication of the scale of therapy practice and, therefore, why it is important to understand what happens in this context in relation to the CEE.

Turning to the second option for managing distress associated with the CEE, Benjamin (2012, p.31) points to 'the need for agency in the face of trauma'. If the CEE is considered a collective trauma, then collective activism would seem necessary for processing the trauma. In addition, if eco-activists represent people who have been able to face the reality of the CEE and the feelings this evokes – 'the canaries in the mine' (Gillespie, 2019, p.107) – then perhaps they can further our understanding of the defences involved for others and help to find ways of maintaining engagement. Hence, my research explores the space where therapy and activism meet by interviewing three groups of participants: therapists, clients and eco-activists.

I acknowledge at the outset that experience of the CEE will vary across the globe depending on context, resources and levels of agency. In this study I focus on the UK context and those who are willing to be engaged with the topic. My research is located within the field of climate psychology and predominantly draws on psychoanalytic, psychosocial and psychotherapeutic literatures. The study takes a psychosocial perspective to consider the role of conscious and unconscious individual and social defences against eco-distress. I draw on psychoanalytic concepts from various schools in a pluralistic manner in an attempt to understand what I observe and experience.

Another, and unexpected, contribution of my study to the field of psychosocial studies is a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. My experience of adapting the psychosocial research methods of free association narrative interviewing and biographical narrative interview method to an online environment has led to a useful development of the methods (Macagnino, 2023). In Chapter 4, section 4.7.1, I offer suggestions for maintaining intimacy during online interviewing thus furthering the applicability of these methods, particularly as working online has become much more commonplace and is likely to remain a means of research and therapy in the future.

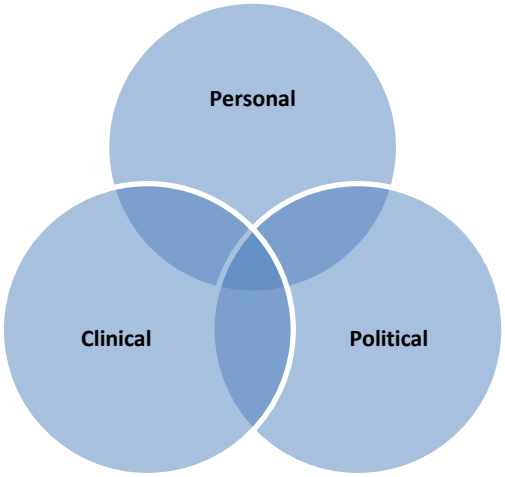
In the rest of this introductory chapter I give some background for my interest in the topic. I discuss the connection between the CEE and mental health, the emergence of the discipline of climate psychology and briefly introduce environmental activism. I outline the development of my research questions, explain my ontological and epistemological position and provide a rationale for a psychosocial methodology. I explain my use of certain terms and close with an overview of the remaining chapters.

1.2 My interest in the topic

As the CEE pressed ever more prominently into my awareness over the last few years I began to reflect on my role as a therapist in relation to this. Despite readily talking about the natural world, my clients very rarely mention the CEE or their feelings about it; I became curious about this. Questions arose such as, is the traditional model of therapy fit for this purpose? What guidance is there from our professional bodies about how to work with this material?

In parallel, my own distress about what was happening to our planet and fears for the future grew. I took part in Extinction Rebellion protests and experienced a sense of empowerment and hopefulness. I wanted to understand the role of activism in managing feelings associated with the CEE.

The entangled assemblage of these subjective experiences formed the starting point for this study. In an attempt to create some structure to my research I conceptualised the assemblage as three interlocking lenses:



- *Clinical* – professional experience as a psychotherapist
- *Personal* – my own subjectivities and identities
- *Political* – concern for environmental issues such as climate change, species extinction and climate injustice; role of professional bodies

Figure 1 – Three interlocking lenses

A consequence of this entanglement is that I use different voices in producing this thesis. It is not easy or perhaps even desirable to separate my identities into neat, separate voices; they inform one another in dynamic and ambiguous ways. Sometimes I write as a member of a group, for example as a therapist or activist, and sometimes as a researcher where I have stepped back and try to think beneath-the-surface and beyond what the group can articulate. I reflect on these multiple levels and identities in Chapter 9.

1.3 The CEE and mental health

Understanding our relationship with the natural world is vital within the current context of climate change and environmental crisis. Global temperature rise is undisputed, the arctic sea ice is melting, sea levels are rising and we are seeing more extreme weather in the form of storms, drought and floods (Herring et al., 2018 cited in Bendell, 2018). Some climate scientists warn of 'inevitable near term social collapse' (Bendell, 2018, p.2) suggesting that we are 'set for disruptive and uncontrollable levels of climate change, bringing starvation, destruction, migration, disease and war' (Bendell, 2018, p.12). Environmental scientists are describing our current era as the sixth mass extinction event in the planet's history with approximately half of all plant and animal species at risk (World Wildlife Fund,

2018). UN Secretary-General António Guterres called the latest report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Working Group 1 ‘a code red for humanity’ (United Nations, 2021, online). The evidence shows that these effects are anthropogenic, of man’s own making.

The two social and political problems of climate change and mental health are increasingly understood to be inter-linked such that attention is now being given to the psychological and emotional impact of the CEE. There is increased awareness and concern regarding the CEE with 75% of people in Great Britain stating they are worried about climate change (Office for National Statistics, 2021). In 2022 the IPCC report mentioned the impacts on mental health for the first time stating:

> *‘Mental health challenges, including anxiety and stress, are expected to increase under further global warming in all assessed regions, particularly for children, adolescents, elderly, and those with underlying health conditions’ (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2022, online)*

Evidence shows that climate change and extreme weather lead to both direct and indirect negative consequences for people’s mental health (Obradovich et al., 2018). Depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), guilt, grief, anger and anxiety have all been associated with climate change (Lawrence et al., 2021; Lertzman, 2015) and are particularly prevalent in young people (Hickman et al., 2021). These symptoms are often referred to under the overly simplistic umbrella terms of eco-anxiety or climate anxiety. These labels have a clinical ring about them although many believe they are a healthy response to the CEE, rather than a pathology (Bednarek, 2019).

Reflecting on climate change can be distressing and may be too much to bear at times. Some psychoanalysts are, therefore, particularly interested in the unconscious psychological defences against such distress, namely denialism, disavowal and negation (Weintrobe, 2013), and how these can be addressed in the interests of a more appropriate engagement with climate change.

Psychotherapy and counselling professions have consequently begun to recognise the need to attend to eco-anxiety. There is a growing number of articles in professional journals and continuous professional development (CPD) events covering the topic of climate change and eco-anxiety.

1.4 Climate psychology

As a result of these trends, an emerging field of climate psychology has developed. Climate psychology is defined by the Climate Psychology Alliance as:

> *'a new way of understanding our collective paralysis in the face of worsening climate change… It is concerned with the emotions, and the social and mental processes that have contributed to the ecological and climate crisis and our responses and processes of adaptation to it.' (Climate Psychology Alliance, 2023, online)*

In the last decade psychoanalytic ideas have contributed enormously to understanding our relationship to the natural world and to our engagement with the CEE. Prior to this contribution, research and policies were based on the assumption that people are rational, and that their conscious attitudes accurately reflect what they think and feel. Communication policies aimed at encouraging change towards more sustainable behaviour have tended to follow an information-deficit model (Adams, 2016) whereby it has been assumed that given the facts, people will act in pro-environmental ways. There have even been incentives offered for taking up pro-environmental choices (Weintrobe, 2013). Such approaches fail to recognise that humans are complex and conflicted subjects. They also fail to take account of deeper meanings that we make of the CEE, often hidden to conscious measurement. Psychoanalytic ideas have begun to shed light on our collective lack of action in relation to the CEE through an understanding of our relationship with the natural world and the unconscious defences we use to spare us from the painful feelings evoked when we face the reality of the CEE.

In addition, a more sociological perspective recognises the political, cultural and social factors that also govern our thoughts, emotions and behaviours in relation to the natural world and the CEE. The emerging discipline of climate psychology incorporates psychoanalytic concepts and takes a psychosocial perspective, drawing on psychotherapeutic ideas as well as ecopsychology, political and social theory and philosophy. It explores our anxieties and defences associated with the climate and ecological crisis, considers forms of support and aims to help individuals and communities cope and adapt. In essence it aims to provide a psychosocial understanding by exploring the 'interactions between the personal and the political, the psychological and the social' (Andrews and Hoggett, 2021, p.157). As such, it aligns with my own professional experience of working as a psychotherapist and a

psychosocial researcher. The stated aims of climate psychology also align with my own personal reasons for embarking on my PhD, namely to build understanding and support for individuals and groups, to enable transformation and adaptation and to help us all cope with the consequences of the CEE.

1.5 The CEE and environmental activism

The term 'activist' is ambiguous and loaded with associations. Broadly speaking, it means 'being proactive to try to create change' (Lawson, 2021, p.6) and in the context of my study, the desired changes are social and political measures to stop environmental damage. There are many people who would fit this definition but would not feel comfortable to call themselves an activist due to connotations of combat and confrontation. Their proactivity may take the form of quietly signing petitions or writing emails. In my study, I spoke to people who did identify as activists. They were willing to speak up for the issues they believed in and face confrontation with those of a different mindset.

There are many environmental activist groups covering a range of broadly environmental concerns such as animal cruelty, habitat destruction, pollution and toxic waste. Organisations such as Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace have been campaigning specifically on climate change issues since the 1980s although climate activism started in earnest in the 1990s, with many more campaign groups forming in the 2000s. Since 2018, as climate change has risen in the public agenda, there have been a number of high-profile movements responsible for protests and campaigns related to climate change. Two in particular have caught public and political attention, namely Extinction Rebellion (XR) and the youth led Fridays for Future (FFF) (Ares and Bolton, 2020).

In 2019, XR protests brought London to a standstill twice, in April and October with thousands of arrests and costing over £37 million in policing (Ares and Bolton, 2020). In 2019 five hundred and eighty one FFF school strikes were reported in the UK (Fridays For Future, 2023). Both XR and FFF identify as engaging in non-violent civil disobedience and this contrasts with other more militant groups such as the more recently formed Just Stop Oil who employ block and disrupt tactics (Scheuerman, 2022).

1.6 The natural history of my research questions

My research questions evolved and emerged as the research process progressed. I began with the broad aim of exploring how our relationship with the natural world is expressed through selfhood, subjective identities and in particular through the sense of an ecological self (Naess, 1989). In particular, how is the development, experience and expression of a person's ecological self mediated by the CEE? What does it mean to live with an awareness of 'end times' (Kassouf, 2017, p.150) and how is this presented in therapeutic and activist contexts?

Although I was able to articulate my broad aims, it was difficult to pin down specific research questions. Each time I examined the task, I saw a different perspective, 'a different face of the ontology' (Crociani-Windland, 2009, p.53). I could look from the perspective of mental health, the way in which connection with the nonhuman and natural world affects our mental and emotional wellbeing. Alternatively, I could look as a therapist seeking to develop my practice, perhaps incorporating the nonhuman world into my work with clients. Moving further round the topic, I could look at how the sense of self develops in relation to nature or from a political vantage point, how individuals are called to activism. Through the life of this project I have stood in all these positions to view my questions and have had to allow them to remain open to development.

In the final iteration, the questions which this study has sought to answer are articulated as follows:

1. How are feelings regarding the CEE experienced in therapy and activism? Where are the similarities, differences and gaps?
2. What unconscious defences are employed in therapy and activism to manage difficult feelings? In what way are they helpful or unhelpful?
3. Are the current models, contexts and tools of therapy relevant for supporting individuals to deal with the emotional impact of the CEE? What else is helpful?
4. What do we understand about the task of therapy and activism in these times?

1.7 Ontological and epistemological foundations

My overarching qualitative approach is critical realism and contextualism. I assume that 'a real and knowable world […] sits 'behind' the subjective and socially-located

knowledge [I] can access'. (Braun and Clarke, 2013, p.27) and my aim is 'to understand factors influencing and effects of particular meanings or representations expressed' (Braun and Clarke, 2013, p.21). In terms of my research questions, I see the CEE as a factual reality, the backdrop to our lives which is more or less visible depending on how we engage with it. I also begin with the assumption that awareness of the CEE generates profound and often unconscious anxiety (Adams, 2016). The way in which we construct the reality of the CEE in terms of knowledge, will be psychological, social, cultural, moral, ideological and political. Any knowledge claims I personally may make will, therefore, be 'local, situated and provisional' (Braun and Clarke, 2013, p.30).

1.7.1 Rationale for a psychosocial methodology

In their key text on psycho-social methodologies, *'Researching beneath the Surface: a psycho-social approach to research practice and method'*, Simon Clarke and Paul Hoggett chart the development of psycho-social studies (Clarke and Hoggett, 2009). A dissatisfaction with the preoccupation with cognition and reason, and a corresponding increased interest in emotion, led to a challenge to the more traditional models in the social sciences pre-1990. They make the point that the split between psychology and sociology or the individual and society has been unhelpful to both fields of study.

It can be seen from my broad themes and research questions outlined above that there is both a psychological perspective and a societal one. I am interested in the subjective experience of individuals as well as social factors, particularly those found in therapy and activism cultures. There is also a much broader global and historical context of the CEE which constructs our subjectivities. As Jessica Benjamin states when speaking about cultural systems more broadly, so much happens

> *'against the backdrop of this "social third"… even if we are able to see around it and beyond it, we cannot undo its powerful staging effects because they are the very stuff of which our meanings and intentions are made' (Benjamin, 2012, p.49)*

From this ontological position, subjective experience and individual psyches are understood to be anchored in collective discursive systems. The project, therefore, utilised a psychosocial approach which is fully discussed in Chapter 4.

It is also necessary to consider how to research the unconscious aspect of the topic, the latent meanings within the data. A psychosocial approach is one which offers the possibility of researching unconscious material since it draws on psychoanalytic theories and concepts to research 'beneath the surface' and 'beyond the purely discursive' (Clarke and Hogget, 2009, p.2). A psychoanalytic understanding of the self does not assume 'a unitary rational self' but rather 'one torn, ambivalent and in two minds, governed by powerful narratives, meanings and imaginings, … besieged by potentially overwhelming emotions such as fear, despair' (Hoggett, 2013, p.57).

A psychosocial position then is concerned with both inner and outer worlds, the psyche and the sociocultural, and can provide a methodology which recognises hidden unconscious structures; in effect it is a transdisciplinary approach that addresses a space that neither psychology or sociology individually adequately address (Redman, 2016).

1.8 The use of language and terms

In addition to the glossary provided at the beginning of this document, I wish to clarify some particular terminology and choice of language that I use throughout this thesis as often it may be perceived that terms are used interchangeably when in fact I have made a conscious choice according to context and the associations each term evokes.

Psychosocial/psycho-social

There has been much debate regarding whether a hyphen should be used. Hoggett (2008) argues for the hyphen suggesting that it signifies a space between the psychological and social where new ideas can emerge which are neither purely psychological or purely social. Conversely others argue that there is such a merger and interpenetration of the two disciplines at the site of meeting that one bleeds into the other, and no such metaphorical space exists. I have oscillated between these two views throughout this project. The fact that there is a debate speaks to the ambiguity and messiness of psychosocial studies. There can ultimately be no right or wrong here. Rather than choosing one form, I use one or other in relation to what I feel is the best fit for a particular discussion. The oscillation in the text is deliberate and contextually determined.

Therapist/psychoanalyst/psychotherapist/counsellor/counselling psychologist

Unless a person's exact title is required, I use the term 'therapist' as an umbrella term that captures professionals working in the talking therapies. Although there is debate about the definitions of each title and the differences between them in terms of training and expertise, for the purposes of this study using an umbrella term is sufficient.

Affect/emotions/feelings

Here I follow Crociani-Windland and Hoggett (2012) in distinguishing these terms and use

> *'the term 'affect' to describe the more bodily based and indeterminate level of experience, while using the term 'emotion' to refer to experience that has undergone qualification as it enters into a more discursive level. We use the term 'feelings' to denote the general area within which we make those distinctions along a spectrum of continuity between body and mind' (p.164)*

Nature/natural world/nonhuman/more-than-human

I use 'nature' and 'the natural world' and nonhuman when writing and thinking from a more objective and perhaps analytic place. As terms that are used in everyday speech they have also proved useful when discussing the topic with participants. 'More-than-human' is associated with a more ecopsychological discourse. The term 'more-than-human' was first coined by ecologist and philosopher David Abram (1997) to refer to a world that includes and exceeds human societies and underlines the inter-connected and inter-dependent relationships between the multitude of beings inhabiting the earth.

Climate change/climate crisis/climate and ecological emergency

I have chosen to use 'climate and ecological emergency' (CEE) in the writing of this thesis to reflect the scale of the existential threat as well as the interconnectedness of climate change and other environmental issues such as species and habitat loss, pollution, food and water scarcity. When interviewing non-activist participants, however, I used the term 'climate change' which I felt to be less controversial and shocking; I wanted to make it easier for them to engage in a conversation from wherever they were. It was also a way of gauging where they were on their own

climate journey. For activists, I felt able to use the term 'climate and ecological emergency' because they recognise the urgency and are already engaged.

Eco-anxiety/eco-distress

Eco-anxiety has become a popular term to refer to troubling feelings associated with the CEE. However, it can be misleading as it suggests anxiety is the only experience when in fact a cocktail of emotions are experienced which interact in complex ways with each other and with individual and social factors. This is discussed in detail in Chapter 3, section 3.1. I have chosen to use the term eco-distress to refer to the broad range of difficult feelings experienced in response to the CCE but use eco-anxiety if I am referring to another author's work where they have used that term.

Interviewer/Trudi; Participant/Name

I have chosen not to use 'interviewer' and 'participant' in the transcripts as this depersonalises the interaction and maintains a myth of objectivity (Holmes, 2019). Instead I use my own name and the pseudonym of the participant to highlight two people in an inter-subjective process of mutual meaning making.

1.9 Outline of chapters

Following this chapter, Chapter 2 sets the broad context for my study by examining the philosophical, psychoanalytic and psychosocial literature concerning our relationship with the natural world and the CEE. I draw on a variety of psychoanalytic schools to illustrate our ambivalent relationship with the natural world and the connection with our early experience as infants. More recent psychosocial perspectives are discussed that show how sociocultural and political systems influence our relationship with the natural world and how they have contributed to the current CEE.

Chapter 3 focusses attention on the psychological and emotional impact of the CEE by drawing on literature predominantly from sociology and psychotherapeutic fields. It discusses the literature regarding climate emotions and the individual and social defences used by us all to protect against painful feelings evoked by the CEE. The chapter also examines the literature surrounding the use of therapy and activism as possible ways of managing these feelings and introduces a recent model for living with the CEE.

Chapter 4 details the research methodology and methods used to address the research questions. It argues for a psychosocial approach and offers a rationale for the overall structure of the study. The three participant samples of therapists, clients and activists are described together with the methods used, ethical issues, and the process of analysis. It also includes a critique of the methods and a discussion of using them in an online environment.

Chapter 5 describes the collective findings from the therapist and client participants which together form what I have called the 'clinical lens'. It introduces a puzzle – therapists and clients value and care about the natural world but do not readily talk about the CEE or the feelings this evokes. It describes the way in which clients and therapists make sense of this puzzle using a shared understanding of what therapy is for, that is for personal inner world concerns.

Chapter 6 forms the second part of my research findings by describing the findings from the activist sample which I have called 'the political lens'. It shows the complex reasons that people choose to become activists and the way in which activism transforms difficult feelings regarding the CEE into positive affect and feelings. The way in which inner reflection is separate from outer world action is described. The chapter also draws attention to differences within activist groups and the role that group culture can have on the way in which emotions are managed.

Chapter 7 builds on the findings in Chapters 5 and 6 to theorise what happens when we try to take our eco-distress into therapy or activism. I draw on relevant literature to suggest that strong defences of disavowal are in play that serve to keep difficult feelings out of awareness, even in therapeutic contexts. The psychological process of splitting is a particular feature of these defences and is discussed in detail. Social defences are also discussed. The role of transitional space, play and the concept of the therapeutic third in therapy and activism is examined and compared.

Chapter 8 takes a more practical perspective by considering the implications of the research findings. It argues that a revisioning and recrafting of therapy as an eco-psychosocial practice is needed in order to support people experiencing eco-distress. It highlights the need for therapists to work with their own feelings regarding the CEE and to become climate aware. It suggests that therapists need to be more

proactive. It also calls on more support from professional bodies and training organisations to assist and equip therapists to take on this role.

Chapter 9 draws together my reflections, findings and discussion to show the extent to which I have been able to answer my research questions. It summarises the contributions my study has made to the field of climate psychology, namely by adding further insights and understanding to the play of feelings and defences encountered in response to the CEE, by proposing implications for how therapy practice needs to adapt and to the evolution of psycho-social methodology for an online environment. I also discuss alternative viewpoints and the limitations of the study together with suggestions for further research. The chapter concludes by arguing that therapy has an important role to play in these times but it needs to adapt its frame of reference. Inner and outer worlds need to be considered alongside each other, together with an ecological perspective. Therapists need to learn to work in an eco-psychosocial space.

Chapter 2 – Our Relationship with the Natural World: From Psychological Through Social to Psychosocial

Introduction

In order to set the scene for a psycho-social understanding of our emotional responses to the CEE it is necessary to first consider how our relationship with the natural world more broadly is understood from this perspective. How have we come to this place of crisis? What is it about human beings that mean we seem hell bent on the destruction of the earth that we depend on?

This chapter will begin by reviewing the literature that offers a psychosocial understanding of our relationship with the natural world. Specifically, I first review the literature from a psychoanalytic tradition by discussing key ideas from Freud, Klein, attachment theory and self psychology. I then move on to discuss contributions from the field of ecopsychology and from more recent sociopolitical thinking.

2.1 Psychoanalysis

In the last decade psychoanalytic ideas have contributed enormously to understanding our relationship to the natural world and to our engagement with the CEE. However, psychoanalytic ideas regarding our relationship to the natural world can also be found in early psychoanalytic texts.

Freud

Although Freud showed an interest in the link between human psychological development and the climate, speculating that the Ice Age heralded the psychological state of anxiety in man, he did not pursue these ideas in any great depth, suggesting perhaps some ambivalence about publishing ideas which at the time could have lost psychoanalysis some of its legitimacy (Kassouf, 2017). However, he did make some notable comments regarding man and nature. For example, in *The Future of an Illusion* (1927) he says,

> '*The principal task of civilisation, its actual raison d'etre, is to defend us against nature…But no one is under the illusion that nature has already been vanquished; few dare to hope that she will ever be entirely subjected to man' (1927, p.693)*

In other words, Freud saw man and nature as separate and in conflict, and that both the natural world and man's inner psychological world are 'untamable and unmasterable' (Koger and Du Nann Winter, 2011, p.66).

Joseph Dodds points to some notable ambivalence in Freud's writing regarding the human and nonhuman relationship which is indicative of the dominant Western paradigm since the Enlightenment (Dodds, 2011). Firstly, Freud frames the relationship as binary and oppositional, human versus nature, male versus female and order versus chaos, civilisation's attempt to master nature. At the same time, Freud signals our fear of nature,

> *'There are elements which seem to mock at all human control: the earth, which quakes and is torn apart and buries all human life and its works….With these forces nature rises up against us, majestic, cruel and inexorable; she brings to our mind once more our weakness and helplessness, which we thought to escape through the work of civilization' (1927, p.693)*

It is worth considering the historical context in which Freud was writing and working. The mechanistic, reductionist and rationalist thinking during the Enlightenment in Europe contributed to the hyper-separation between humans and the natural world. The modern scientific age was at its zenith during Freud's time (Dodds, 2011) and nature became an object to be studied in a detached manner. Cartesian foundations of modern science that splits a unified reality into separate objects and dualisms is now firmly embedded within Western discourse (Zylstra et al., 2014). Ecofeminists further argue that these dualisms are gendered; a feminine nature being an object for masculine study, utilisation and control by humans (Plumwood, 2009).

Shepard (1982) looks further back in time suggesting that the shift in relationship between man and nature began some ten thousand years ago with the shift from nomadic foraging to settled village life. Using psychoanalytic theories he argues that man developed unconscious resentment of his dependency on nature, anxiety about potential lack of food and a fixation on natural cycles. He suggests that duality of thinking developed at this point (in /out of the village; wild/tame; good/bad for crops) and the land was seen as a tool rather than as a presence to be encountered (Shepard, 1982). Totton (2011) summarises this progression:

> *'In the move from hunter gatherer society to agriculture, human beings tried to gain control over the world, over each other, and over the other-than-human and more-than-human. In doing this we split ourselves off from the world – it became in fact our environment, rather than the whole of which we are an integral part. […] By trying to control the world we have made it other, and therefore dangerous and frightening' (2011, p.2)*

Returning to Freud, his concepts of Eros – 'the preserver of all things' –, and Thanatos – 'death instincts' – (Freud, 1920, p.620) can be usefully applied to our relationship with nature. Over-consumption and over-population can be seen as an unconscious expression of our libidinal drives for pleasure (Eros) and the destruction of habitats and species extinction as an unconscious expression of our aggression (Thanatos) (Koger and Du Nann Winter, 2011). Dodds (2011) suggests there is a more silent expression of Thanatos in the desire for annihilation expressed in apocalyptic narratives of modern books and films. Dodds (2011) also suggests that when we are trying to understand our responses to the ecological emergency we need to consider our anxieties and phantasies regarding death.

Additionally, Freud's proposed conflict between the id, ego and superego can be applied to many everyday environmental decisions relating to the natural world; do I buy that take-away coffee in a non-recyclable cup because I really want it or do I recognise the environmental damage or do I hear the moralistic critical voice of the environmental movement and feel guilt?

A Kleinian Perspective

The unconscious defensive mechanisms of splitting, projection and projective identification central to Melanie Klein's psychoanalytic theory (Mitchell, 1986) have been drawn upon to further understand our relationship with the natural world. Kleinian theory sees early infant love as ruthless, greedy, envious and demanding. Western culture treats the natural world much as an infant would treat the breast/mother – as a breast-toilet, destroying Mother Earth with our greed and evacuated waste (Keene, 2013). However, our dependency on the earth for survival conjures up similar anxieties and fears of abandonment and retribution felt in infancy (Pick, 2013). Depression associated with the CEE explained in Kleinian terms is that which occurs when we come to value our good objects – the natural world – and at the same time are unable to protect them from our own destructive forces (Steiner, 2013).

Randall (2005) similarly theorises that in Western culture, the environment is conceived as maternal – Mother Earth. Randall depicts several ways in which our infantile desires and phantasies are played out in our relationship to nature. She highlights the way in which desires become translated as needs – 'I need to fly abroad' for example, (Randall, 2005, p.172) as an unconscious strategy to cajole or trick a munificent 'mother' into giving us what we want. Another dynamic is that of the resistant child to a perceived demanding mother – 'Why should I'; 'I don't want to' (Randall, 2005, p.172). A third dynamic is that of hoping that the adults will take charge – 'They'll find a technological answer'; 'What difference can I make' (Randall, 2005, p.173). Randall summarises these dynamics, 'Mother Earth has become a with-holding, threatening and abandoning parent struggling with a spiteful, jealous and destructive child' (Randall, 2005, p.174).

Hinshelwood (1993) draws on these Kleinian concepts to theorise our relationship with the countryside in general and also begins to acknowledge sociocultural factors that influence this relationship. He argues that our perceptions of nature are mediated by cultural factors and, like Williams (1973), shows how our associations with nature have altered according to the historical sociocultural context. He charts the way in which the arts have symbolised these changing perceptions from nature as dangerous ('the heath') and the town as a place of safety ('the hearth'), through nature as a place of restoration and harmony compared to the city as dangerous and chaotic, to our current perceptions in the context of the CEE as nature being invaded and infected by the malignant forces of man's technologies. He considers these sociocultural shifts alongside primitive individual and psychological limits inherent within the human psyche. He brings us back to Freud and Klein by proposing that what is common to the different historical perceptions of nature is a contest between benign and malignant forces, a splitting of good and evil, male and female. He reminds us that even though we may be consciously distressed about the destruction being wrought upon the world, we also harbour deeply unconscious violent and destructive phantasies. It is these shadow elements of our psyche that he suggests limit the change required to deal with the CEE.

Attachment Theory

Drawing on attachment theory some authors suggest that the internal working models developed in infancy act as a template for our relationship to the nonhuman

world (Koger and Du Nann Winter, 2011; Jordan, 2009) and Searles (1972) suggests that the relationship between infant and the nonhuman world is as important for human development as the relationship with the mother. Totton (2014) describes a secure attachment developing from beyond the mother-infant dyad to include the wider environment suggesting that to feel cherished and nurtured by all around you facilitates the development of an 'ecological self, a wild mind' (Totton, 2014, p.52).

There is some evidence to support these ideas. Schweitzer, Glab and Brymer (2018) used a mixed method incorporating phenomenology and psychoanalytic theory to explore the lived experience of the natural world. They identified overarching themes suggestive of a primary attachment relationship. These were: nature as a primary attachment; nature experienced as a secure base; nature experienced as twinship; nature experienced as containing and nature experienced as embodied. They conclude that relationship with nature is an essential component of an integrated sense of self and hence also essential for emotional and psychological wellbeing (Schweitzer, Glab and Brymer, 2018). However, their study was based on participants who already regarded their relationship with nature as being essential to their wellbeing. Two questions then arise; how might the relationship with nature be experienced firstly by individuals for whom nature is not regarded as essential for wellbeing, and secondly for those who are not currently experiencing a sense of wellbeing?

Bodnar et al. (2023) conducted a US based study with trainee teachers and concluded that 'personal ecosystems played similar roles to familial relationships or close friendships … people relate to the environment similarly to how they relate to people with whom they have meaningful attachment relationships (Bodnar et al., p.110) and 'No matter where we are from, a private ecosystem lives within us much like a family' (Bodnar et al., p.117).

Spitzform (2000) argues for a developmental model that incorporates the ecological self pointing to the lack of a framework that also includes the role played by the natural world. She summarises the work of developmental theorists such as Beebe and Lachmann, Stern and Fast which shows that an infant's capacity to organise their experience with the outside world has been established within the first year of life and proposes that as well as the human world this includes expectations about how

‘interactions with the more-than-human world will go’ (Spitzform, 2000, p.271). She goes on to make the point that the infant’s experience is further mediated by the affective response of the caregiver as they explore the nonhuman world.

Koger and Du Nann Winter (2011) focus on the interaction between attachment relationships with caregivers and the relationship with the natural world proposing a direct link between early attachment experiences and our relationship with the nonhuman world. For instance, they suggest an overly demanding caregiver can result in the development of a false self that equates pleasing others with attending to one’s own needs. This can develop into a consumerism or overconsumption as one seeks to express self through external materials. They suggest that when insufficient attention is received by the infant narcissism can develop with a focus on needs gratification. They argue this can be observed in the behaviour of much of the Western world that sees the natural world as existing for their own needs. Narcissism can lead to compulsion, repetitive behaviours and addictions which can also be damaging to self and the environment. The lack of caretaker attention can also lead to depression and despair and Koger and Du Nann Winter (2011) suggest that this can be observed in reactions to environmental problems. Finally they describe paranoia as a lack of trust in the world resulting from insufficient caretaker attention and suggest this can translate into a sense of a threatening and dangerous nonhuman world. However, their argument is overly simplistic and linear. Many of us developed a secure attachment with our caregivers and yet are still driven by consumerism, or see the natural world as a resource to be used or have a fear of certain aspects of nature.

Self Psychology

Kassouf (2023) draws on Kohut’s self psychology (Kohut, 1984; Kohut, 1971) to add another psychoanalytic perspective on our relationship with the natural world. She suggests that as well as Kohut’s original three archaic part-selves (grandiose, powerless and alienated) there is a fourth archaic part-self, the precarious self. She suggests that the precarious self experiences multiple precarities – cosmological, biological, environmental, sociopolitical – and seeks safety, health and salvation.

Kohut postulates that if archaic selves are not adequately met by an empathic object which mirrors, can be idealised and can be seen as sharing humanity, then there is a

defensive overinvestment in the corresponding part self. The grandiose self becomes more narcissistic, the powerless self desperately seeks merger with an idealised other and the alienated self maintains a fantasy where all differences between self and the other are obliterated. Kassouf builds on this theory and posits that if the precarious self suffers from a lack of awareness or engagement with the more-than-human world, for example through an 'insulating petroprivilege' (Kassouf, 2023, p.10), or has traumatic experiences of the more-than-human world, then the precarious part self defensively overinvests in its humanness, separation and independence from the more-than-human reducing it to merely food or fuel. This leads us into a more ecopsychological understanding of our relationship with the natural world.

2.2 Ecopsychology

Kassouf suggests that the needs of the precarious self can be met through an 'empathic awareness of our mutual embeddedness [in the more-than-human world]' and by becoming 'attuned to the permeability of the self with the more-than-human world' (Kassouf, 2023, p.8). In further describing this relationship of embeddedness and permeability, Kassouf says 'The more-than-human remains always already present within, and our more-than-human selves are always already present without' (Kassouf, 2023, p.16). She draws on cosmology to support this idea, recognising our 'mineral origins' and suggests 'We are all more more-than-human that not' (Kassouf, 2023, p.12).

Spitzform (2000) argues that we have lost the sense of our animal bodies:

> *'We forget that we are born to the more-than-human world which meets us at every developmental step …. As if our human social experience was not integrally dependent on the complexities of the web of life itself' (2000, p.275)*

She stresses that development of an ecological self – a self that is interconnected with all life – is dependent on relatedness with the nonhuman world and this continues throughout life. Our evolutionary identity as animal is further considered by Dodds (2011). He revisits Freud's ideas of the 'primal uncanny' – the experience of something both familiar and alien – to explain our ambivalence towards the nonhuman. He suggests that nature is something close to us but it 'has undergone a cultural repression' (p.123). The borders between human and nonhuman, birth and death, civilised and wild are where we experience this sense of primal uncanny.

Deleuze and Guattari (1988) similarly ‘make no distinction between man and nature….rather they are one and the same essential reality, the producer-product’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, p.4-5). In his book *The Three Ecologies*, Guattari (2000) also argued for the need to consider mind, nature and society as interlinking ‘registers’ that cannot be separated. They are ‘inter-changeable lenses’ (Guattari, p.41) They interact and we need to think transversally. From this perspective, the three ecologies are continually integrated within an emergent self.

The concept of an ecological self was developed by Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess (Naess, 1989). The ecological self recognises a shared cosmology, a permeability of boundaries and the interconnectedness of all life. ‘We may be said to be in, of, and for Nature from our very beginning’ (Naess, 1995, p.14). Key aspects involved in the experience of one’s ecological self can be summarised as follows: an emotional connection or empathy with nonhuman life, such as one might feel when witnessing the suffering of an animal or the destruction of a rainforest; the perception of similarity or relatedness to nonhuman life such that the boundaries between self and other dissolve; behaving in a nurturing or protective manner towards the nonhuman world as one would towards one’s self (Bragg, 1996). There is, therefore, an emotional, cognitive and behavioural aspect to the ecological self (Windhorst, 2019).

The concept of the ecological self serves as a meeting point between the diverse spheres of ecology, psychology, environmental philosophy and environmental activism, and as such is of interest to the field of ecopsychology (Roszak, Gomes and Kanner, 1995). Ecopsychology seeks to examine the emotional and psychological aspects of humans’ relationship with the rest of the natural world, particularly the reciprocal effects (Jordan, 2015). Although not a unified discipline, a central tenet of ecopsychology is that the more human beings become physically, emotionally, psychologically and spiritually disconnected from nature the more psychological distress we suffer. Correspondingly, the more we are disconnected from nature the more environmental distress the planet suffers (Roszak, Gomes and Kanner, 1995).

It has been argued that such unified understanding of the natural world can be found in indigenous cultures that are more integrated with their environment and in

continual contact with nature (Duncan, 2018). The way of life in such cultures involves an embodied and subjective engagement, with individuals acting as participants within the environment. Animals and plants are seen as carriers of messages to be symbolically interpreted, a mode of thinking that some anthropologists have suggested is more sophisticated than Western linear scientific thinking (Shepard, 1998, cited by Duncan, 2018). For example, the Koyukon of Alaska experience the world as sensate and aware. The world around them can feel and can be offended, therefore, it must be treated with respect at all times (Devall, 1995).

However, resistance to such ideas of unity can surprisingly be found in the writing of the psychoanalyst Searles some decades earlier who has often been quoted in contemporary literature as being one of the first to urge psychoanalysis to engage with the environmental crisis. Although he saw the ecological crisis as 'the greatest threat mankind collectively has ever faced' (Searles, 1972, p.361) and suggested that a relationship with the nonhuman world incorporating both a recognition of kinship and difference is important for a healthy development of self (Searles 1960), he also warned that over-porous boundaries between the self and the nonhuman could lead to a regression to pathological states. I consider this to be a foreshadowing of humans' continued ambivalence regarding our creatureliness. In Hoggett's words 'we are human creatures apparently at war with our own creatureliness' (Hoggett, 2020, p.38).

2.3 Therapeutic views on connection to nature

Despite the resistance to a unity with nature from traditional psychoanalysts, there has been a growing interest amongst the therapy community more generally in the beneficial effects on mental health and wellbeing of increasing our connection with the natural world (Bragg and Atkins, 2016; Lovell, 2016) and this was particularly apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic when people were encouraged to spend time outdoors. Benefits reported in the literature include reduction in depression, anxiety and stress related symptoms, improved mood, increased attentional capacity and a sense of calm which demonstrate a relationship between connection to nature and subjective well being (Capaldi, Dopko and Zelenski, 2014). As a result of such studies interest in nature-based interventions or 'Green Prescribing' for treating mental health is growing and there are numerous examples of such initiatives, such

as therapeutic horticulture, conservation projects, care farms and walking therapy (Mind, 2013).

In seeking explanations for the benefits afforded by spending time in contact with the natural world, we can look to earlier literature in this area covering three major frameworks. Firstly, Wilson's Biophilia Hypothesis (Wilson, 1984) proposes we are biologically programmed to seek contact with the more-than-human and our sense of fulfilment is dependent on this contact. Secondly, Stress Reduction Theory (Ulrich, 1984) based on the evolutionary perspective proposes that humans evolved in natural landscapes, therefore, spending time in natural environments reduces stress built up from being in urban environments and gives physiological and psychological benefits. Ulrich's (1984) study of post-operative patients showed they recovered much quicker when they had access to a natural vista. Thirdly, Attention Restoration Theory (Kaplan and Kaplan, 1989) holds that natural environments restore mental fatigue resulting from everyday cognitive functioning and focussed attention through the 'soft fascination' experienced in natural environments. However, these earlier theories are simple, functional and do not investigate the deeper relational aspects. Researchers have recently shown them to be insufficient to fully explain the affective and cognitive benefits of spending time in natural surroundings (Ohly *et al.*, 2016; Joye, Y. and van den Berg, A., 2011). In addition, affective responses to nature can be negative as well as positive (Windhorst, 2019). Whilst some people find natural environments restorative, others find them anxiety-provoking or uncomfortable and individuals can experience ambivalence towards the same environment (Milligan and Bingley, 2007).

2.4 Neoliberalism, capitalism and social injustice

Several authors bring a psychosocial perspective to the problem of the CEE by including a sociopolitical lens. They link Western neoliberalism with its deregulated economy and consumerist culture with an internalised psychic structure of narcissistic entitlement (Hoggett, 2022; Weintrobe, 2021; Weintrobe, 2020) through a process of 'amoralisation' (Keene, 2013). Kidner (2021) says 'climate change is only a single symptom of a pathology that's so deeply ingrained within industrial society' (2021, p.6). In such a 'culture of uncare' (Weintrobe, 2020, p.351), individuals become greedy, narrow minded, uncaring about others, and engage in omnipotent thinking. 'In the West we feel narcissistically entitled to consume what

we want from wherever we want when we want' (Weintrobe, 2013a, p.9) and 'greed has increasingly become good, not bad' (Hoggett, 2013, p.60). Such greed and entitlement is fuelled through access to consumer credit, mass media, advertising and political propaganda. Whilst our inner sense of entitlement is strengthened, our capacity for caring is weakened. We are led to believe that we are entitled to an easy life, because we are special, because we are 'worth it'. This results in an exploitative and extractive relationship with the natural world. The mostly unconscious cultural norm of a high carbon lifestyle in the Global North drives consumerism creating an ecological debt (Randall, 2013) and the environmental and social damage is exported to those parts of the world that are devalued such as the Global South 'forming a zone of sacrifice to maintain superior entitlement' (Weintrobe, 2020, p.356). In order not to feel our responsibility for this and subsequent shame, guilt and moral injury, powerful mental bubbles of an imaginary world are created where we are cocooned and 'morally deaf, blind and dumb to harmful effects of one's actions' (Weintrobe, 2020, p.357).

Hoggett (2022) describes the cynicism and nihilism exhibited by those in power, leaders and corporations, such that life is stripped of meaning. The natural world for instance is only considered in terms of its external value, purely as a means to an end, to generate profit. He refers to this as 'instrumental rationalism' (Hoggett, 2022, p.29) and links it to broader social domination and oppression seen in the history of colonialisation. Mowat (2022) similarly argues that the CEE is part of broader systems of oppression such as racism, sexism and classism. The domination of nature is simply another form of abuse, the dynamics of oppressor and oppressed present in cultural inequalities are also embedded in our relationship with the natural world, a relationship which sees (white, male) humans as superior, violence inflicted on the natural world and nature as a tradeable commodity. Mowat draws attention to the fact that even within environmental organisations, unconscious processes play out. She cites an example where wildlife sanctuaries were created in Africa by the World Wildlife Foundation by evicting indigenous people from their forest homes, thereby enacting 'White supremacist ideology because they consider White people as the true custodians of the land' (Mowat, 2022, p.3). These power dynamics are maintained and reinforced within a Western culture of neoliberalism, consumerism and individualism.

Neoliberal culture also shapes our social groups. Weintrobe (2021) argues that social groups often act to prevent awareness of our personal responsibility for the CEE. She describes the way in which talk about the CEE is vetoed in social situations and/or the way in which threats caused by the CEE are normalised as hassles and inconveniences. The group acts to protect its members from feeling morally challenged with phrases such as 'you can't save the world'. These group processes are difficult to challenge and group members that do risk being attacked or ejected from the group. At the very least, the group will often deflect by changing the subject.

Even when the CEE is acknowledged and human culpability accepted within social groups, Weintrobe (2021) points to the way in which responsibility is projected towards others such as oil companies, bankers and governments. At the same time, caring and working for change is also projected towards campaigning organisations. In this way, the group is protected from engaging in rational thinking about changes they themselves may have to make.

Summary

The psycho-social literature offers an understanding of a conflicted and ambivalent relationship with the natural world. Psychoanalytic theory suggests early psychic mechanisms such as splitting and projection play out in our nonhuman as well as human relationships. Internal unconscious destructive drives of greed (Eros) and violence (Thanatos) are further maintained and fostered in a neoliberal culture of individualism and consumerism. It is no wonder we find ourselves at a point of crisis.

Waking up to the reality of the CEE can be extremely disturbing and it is to this subject that I now turn. In the next chapter, I discuss the literature examining the emotional impact of recognising our predicament, the defences used to avoid painful and difficult feelings and possible ways in which distress can be managed.

Chapter 3 – Climate Change Emotions and Defences: The Role of Therapy and Activism

'Humankind cannot bear too much reality'

T.S Eliot Burnt Norton. In Four Quartets

Introduction

Waking up to the reality of the CEE is likely to cause shock and disturbing feelings that can be overwhelming and difficult to manage. In this chapter I review the growing literature on climate-related emotions, the unconscious psychological and social defences used to avoid feeling these emotions and how such emotions can be managed. I show how the literature has informed my research questions and identify the gaps in the literature that my study has sought to address.

3.1 Climate change emotions

Climate change emotions, or eco-emotions, are defined as 'affective phenomena which are significantly related to the climate crisis' (Pihkala, 2022, p.1). They are of interest because evidence is building that climate change and extreme weather lead to both direct and indirect negative consequences for people's mental health (Obradovich et al., 2018) leading some authors to declare 'the climate emergency is a mental health emergency' (Lawrance et al., 2022, p.476). Surveys of populations from across the world indicate high levels of concern about the CEE (Clayton, 2020) with 75% of people in Great Britain stating they are worried about climate change (Office for National Statistics, 2021). In a survey across 40 countries 69% of respondents felt climate change was either very or extremely serious (Stokes et al., 2015). There has been an increased interest in understanding the scale and pathways for the effects on mental health of the CEE resulting in a large expansion in climate psychology literature (Lawrance et al., 2022; Pihkala, 2022). New terms for climate emotions have entered the mental health vocabulary such as *eco-anxiety* (Clayton et al., 2017), *ecological grief* (Cunsolo and Ellis, 2018), *pre-traumatic stress disorder* – the psychological impacts of imagining the future based on climate change predictions – (Kerecman-Myers, 2017) and *solastalgia* (Albrecht et al., 2007). The latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report mentioned the impacts on mental health for the first time stating:

> *'Mental health challenges, including anxiety and stress, are expected to increase under further global warming in all assessed regions, particularly for children, adolescents, elderly, and those with underlying health conditions' (IPCC, 2022)*

It has been known for decades that extreme weather events and natural disasters can be a direct source of trauma causing disabling emotions (Clayton, 2020). More subtle and indirect effects of climate change and environmental degradation such as rising temperatures and pollution have also been linked to increased suicide rates, depression, anxiety and worsening of pre-existing mental health disorders (Lawrance et al., 2022). Other reported symptoms include panic attacks, loss of appetite and sleeplessness (Dodds, 2021); PTSD, grief, guilt and anger (Lawrance et al., 2021; Lertzman, 2015). The emotional effects of the CEE are not evenly distributed and symptoms are particularly prevalent in young people (Hickman et al., 2021) leading to those born between the early 1990's and the early 2000's being called the climate generation (Ray, 2020). Other groups affected include those who are exposed to information about the threat more than most such as first responders to climate-related natural disasters, climate scientists and activists (Dodds, 2021). As general awareness of the CEE increases through increased media coverage of extreme weather events and ecological degradation (Ojala et al., 2021), distress associated with the CEE is also expected to increase (Lawrance et al., 2022; Clayton, 2020).

3.1.1 Eco-anxiety

Eco-anxiety has entered the popular media reported as being 'the biggest pop-culture trend of 2019' (McGinn, 2019). There does not seem to be a standardised way of using the term (Coffey et al., 2021) and it has been variously defined as 'a chronic fear of environmental doom' (Clayton et al., 2017, p.68), 'dread associated with negative environmental information' (Clayton, 2020, p.2) and as 'heightened psychological (mental, emotional, somatic) distress in response to the climate emergency' (Bednarek, 2020, online). The term 'eco-anxiety' is an oversimplification (Whitcombe, 2021) as symptoms can be diverse. As well as general anxiety symptoms include depression, guilt, insomnia, panic attacks, shock, fear about the future, grief, helplessness and numbness. First-hand accounts of eco-anxiety are useful to illustrate the range of feelings and emotions that are often given this overarching label. These quotes are from different individuals interviewed for a single article in The Guardian newspaper (Sarner, 2022):

'the feeling of having the rug pulled from under my feet; that I was enjoying a life that was ruining the world'

'It would get to the stage where I would freeze. I remember my stomach dropped, and I thought, "Oh, my God! I've never heard about this before; why are people not talking about it? Why are we not doing anything about it?'

'My heart was pounding. My chest felt tight every time I thought about it – and I couldn't not think about it. I'd often burst into tears because it felt overwhelming. It's like a pit in your stomach – you feel weirdly empty. It's not always the same, but it sometimes takes the form of feeling very sad, hopeless and alone.'

'intense pressure, guilt, shame and anxiety to produce less and do everything to make up for what others were not doing'

In addition, the term is suggestive of pathology rather than an appropriate response to a real threat (Bednarek, 2020) and the CEE challenges us to rethink what we understand as mental health (Armstrong and Pratt-Boyden, 2021). The term also risks individualising the problem rather than acknowledging the social and political aspects of the CEE (Kałwak and Weihgold, 2022).

Some practitioners and researchers have attempted to further elaborate, define and clarify eco-anxiety. For instance, the psychotherapist Caroline Hickman has characterised eco-anxiety in terms of the severity by constructing a simple scale from mild to severe (Hickman, 2020). This is helpful in determining how disturbed an individual is by eco-anxiety but she cautions about using it too rigidly or in an overly clinical way. Psychometric scales have also been developed such as the Climate Anxiety Scale (Clayton and Karazsia, 2020) and the Hogg Eco-anxiety Scale (Hogg et al., 2021). These measure manifestations such as cognitive and emotional impairment, functional impairment, pro-environmental behaviours and direct experience of climate change. Although such scales are useful for measuring the prevalence of environmentally related anxiety across populations they tell us very little about the meaning of such symptoms for a person, how feelings may change and how this may relate to other aspects of their lives and histories.

Ojala et al. (2021) further usefully differentiate anxiety from worry. In relation to the CEE, worry can be seen as having a stronger cognitive component and the authors argues that it is the first step towards critical thinking, problem-solving and engaging with the issue. Worrying about global effects of the CEE, such as the effects in far

away countries or on future generations, rather than on the effect to oneself, is considered a macro worry (Ojala et al., 2021). However, the CEE can be thought of as a wicked problem (Bernstein, 2015), or as Timothy Morton describes it, a hyperobject (Morton, 2010). As such it is often perceived as massive, uncontrollable and unresolvable. For individuals who perceive it as such, worry could become repetitive and intrusive.

3.1.2 Ecological grief

Ecological grief as a response to widespread loss of land, ecosystems and species together with concomitant loss of cultural and community identities has also been reported (Cunsolo and Ellis, 2018). The sense of loss of a positive future and a pristine past contributes to ecological grief as does anticipation of future losses (Ojala et al., 2021). Solastalgia (Albrecht et al., 2007) describes a particular sense of loss of one's home through environmental damage when one is still directly connected to it.

3.1.3 Complexity of eco-emotions

The topic of climate emotions is complex. As well as the diverse range of emotions people may experience, they can also be interconnected (Pihkala, 2022). They can be shaped by social factors, cultural norms and personal experiences and opinion. The interaction between climate emotions and mental health and wellbeing is also complex and studies show mixed results regarding a direct causal relationship (Ojala et al., 2021). It can lead to depression, anxiety, hopelessness and despair but it can also lead to a positive increased engagement with environmental problems or, conversely, apathy and immobility (Pihkala, 2022). This may in part be accounted for by the difficulty in standardising terminology, measurement tools and moderating factors within different groups. Lawrance et al. (2022) offer a framework to conceptualise the multiple ways in which the climate crisis modifies the individual and social factors which impact mental health. At-risk populations include children, the elderly, the chronically ill, those with mental illnesses and those with mobility impairments. In their extensive narrative review of the literature they conclude that 'the climate crisis is a risk multiplier, compounding existing vulnerabilities and disadvantages' (Lawrance et al., 2022, p.445). By risk multiplier they mean that it 'increases the risk of experiencing symptoms diagnosable as a mental disorder, or intensifies symptoms and distress, or both' (Lawrance et al., 2022, p.446). Their

review further illustrates the complexity of the field, the difficulty for mental health professionals in deciding when eco-distress should be considered pathological rather than a normal response to the reality of the CEE and the inter-relationship between individual and societal factors. A recent review of qualitative studies of eco-anxiety concludes that there is a 'need for high-quality psychiatric research exploring its clinical significance and potential interventions' (Soutar and Wand, 2022).

3.1.4 Ontological security

One particular understanding of why awareness of the CEE causes distress is that it poses a threat to our ontological security (Giddens, 1991). Giddens proposed that ontological security is gained from a general trust in the continuation of everyday life, self and others. Ontological security is important for psychological wellbeing and is anchored in the shared sociocultural frameworks that make up every day normality. Unsettling existential questions of meaning, identity, purpose and mortality are bracketed off by our day-to-day taken-for-granted conventions and routines. When this state of ontological security is breached, there is 'a flooding in of anxiety which the ordinary conventions of day-to-day life usually keep successfully at bay' (Giddens, 1991, p.37). Our implicit trust in the fabric of our society is questioned by the CEE (Lucas, 2015). The foundations of late modern society such as consumerism and democracy are threatened together with taken-for-granted things such as personal safety and access to medicine, food and water. In addition, the CEE potentially increases awareness of our mortality thereby breaching ontological security and creating anxiety. Adams (2016) argues that this death anxiety is extended by the CEE to include future generations, other species, natural habitats and places we value.

3.1.5 Critique of eco-anxiety

A small number of authors offer a racial critique of the concept of eco-anxiety. Ray (2021) highlights that although people of colour and indigenous communities are more concerned about climate change because they are more likely to experience the direct effects of it, climate anxiety seems to be of most interest to white people. She asks the question 'Is climate anxiety a form of white fragility' (Ray, 2021, online) and suggests that white climate anxiety is about the fear of losing the comfort of white privilege. She argues that existential anxiety has always plagued people of colour and is not only an issue of climate change – 'What *is* unique is that people

who had been insulated from oppression are now waking up to the prospect of their own unlivable future' (Ray, 2021, online). Similarly, Barnwell et al. (2020) argue that the concept of climate anxiety does not reflect the experience of people in the Global South who are most affected by the CEE. They describe the ongoing social inequalities, oppression and violence that create psychological distress for these communities which is further exacerbated by the effects of climate change. They make the important point that 'Applying the phrase 'climate anxiety' to this context would de-politicise the nature of distress that is rooted in asymmetrical power dynamics' (Barnwell et al., 2020, p.13). Although they refer to the Global South in particular, their critique of the relevance of climate anxiety as a concept applies to those communities in the Global North that experience similar inequalities and oppression, a point made passionately by Heglar (2019) when she refers to 'existential exceptionalism'. Heglar reminds us that 'For 400 years and counting, the United States itself has been an existential threat to Black people' (Heglar, 2019, online).

Experiencing eco-distress is unpleasant at best and devastating at worst leading to severe breakdown (Hickman, 2020). It is not surprising that we all use defences to varying degrees and with varying degrees of consciousness to avoid these feelings. I now turn to discuss the literature regarding these defences.

3.2 Eco-distress and defences

Acknowledging the CEE brings us face-to-face with the reality of our mortality, dependency, loss and responsibility. As discussed in the previous section, this can cause distress which can be overwhelming, psychologically threatening and difficult to manage. Unconscious defence mechanisms can then be triggered as a means of protecting us from too much reality (Weintrobe, 2013a) and holding these feelings out of awareness.

The concept of unconscious defence mechanisms is a central tenet to psychoanalytic thinking and is increasingly being used to understand our responses, or lack of them, to the CEE. Freud originally proposed defence mechanisms of denial and repression as a counter-force to unruly libidinal drives and as a means to keep certain thoughts and feelings we have secret from ourselves as well as others (Freud, 1896). The list of defence mechanisms has since been extended and modified from Anna Freud's nine (Freud, 1936), to Blackman's one hundred and one (Blackman, 2004). Defences

do not only operate at the individual and psychological level, however. We need to also consider the social, political and cultural defence mechanisms that contribute to keeping painful and distressing feelings out of awareness.

In this section, I focus on how the concept of defences has been applied by different authors to our understanding of responses to the CEE. Whilst defences can be useful and at times necessary in order to prevent collapse as further explained below, they can also prevent engagement with the problem. |In the case of the CEE, it is precisely an engagement with the problem that is needed.

3.2.1 Psychological denial

Weintrobe (2013b) differentiates between different forms of psychological denial. The first she terms negation, and describes it as 'the assertion that something that is, is not' (Weintrobe, 2013b, p.37) and goes on to suggest that this can be the first stage of mourning losses. Denial as negation has also been termed literal denial (Cohen, 2013) and helps us to protect us against anxiety caused by too much loss, guilt and shame hitting us all at once; it allows the truth to be absorbed more gradually. For example the denial expressed when someone close to us dies – 'it can't be true'. In the case of the CEE it can be characterised by the belief that climate change is not true and is, for example, merely a conspiracy perpetrated by the left-wing media. Weintrobe (2013b) stresses the importance of the support of others in order to be able to work through such denial and allow reality to penetrate.

There is also a form of denial termed interpretive denial (Cohen, 2013) whereby the truth is acknowledged but interpreted in such a way as to protect us from its full meaning. For instance, climate change is real but part of a natural geological cycle rather than being caused by humans. Thirdly, there is a form of denial termed implicatory denial (Cohen, 2013) or disavowal, the acceptance of reality but the minimising of its significance (Weintrobe, 2013b). It is the knowing and not knowing at the same time, or turning a blind eye. Disavowal drains truth of its emotional significance such that we are no longer disturbed by it (Hoggett, 2013). Weintrobe (2013b) argues that this is a more enduring defence and involves a distortion of reality. Any losses are minimised hence mourning is blocked. Meanwhile, the underlying anxiety that disavowal protects us from escalates leading to further defensive disavowal in a dangerous spiral. Weintrobe (2013b) draws on

clinical experience to outline three conditions under which disavowal is likely to occur. Firstly, when reality has become too obvious to be denied through negation. Secondly, when the damage is too great to repair and thirdly when there is insufficient help and support to bear the anxiety that facing reality will bring. I maintain that these conditions relate to the current reality of the CEE and it is this third type of denial, disavowal, that I focus on in my research.

As described in the previous chapter, when we face the loss of the earth as a dependable source of life for ourselves, future generations and all other species, then this can create a similar level of anxiety to that experienced by an infant who fears the loss of the mother they are totally dependent on and whom they have ravaged with their greed (Keene, 2013). When we see that our leaders are not responding to the crisis, we can feel uncared for and abandoned, another source of anxiety. Our narcissistic entitled self may also fear that if we were to make the changes needed to respond adequately to the CEE we would lose our identity and status that is tied up with our high carbon consumer lifestyles. It is, therefore, expected that disavowal will be employed by many of us.

3.2.2 Many shades of disavowal

Hoggett (2022) describes several forms of disavowal which all serve to keep the reality of the CEE out of everyday awareness: diffusion of responsibility ('China is the problem'); suspension of curiosity (not wanting to find out the relevant information about climate change); splitting/compartmentalisation (knowing about the impact of flying but still taking frequent flights; wishful thinking ('scientists/technology/God will solve it'); doubt ('We need more research and evidence'); knowing is not believing ('surely it can't be that bad'); distancing/detachment ('it's not my problem' or 'I can't do anything about it' or taking an intellectual problem-solving approach); routinisation (immersing oneself in routine day-to-day tasks or avoiding thinking too far into the future).

3.2.3 Proximal and distal psychological defences

Adams (2016) approaches the subject of defences from the perspective of ontological security. He draws together ideas from Terror Management Theory (TMT) to argue that psychological defences such as denial and disavowal are

> *'understood not as a denial of ecological crisis and the anxieties they give rise to, but in terms of something more psychologically, or even biologically, fundamental that ecological crisis is a manifestation of – a denial of our own mortality,' (Adams, 2016, p.149)*

He particularly draws on Janis Dickenson's (Dickinson, 2009) work that applies TMT to the CEE. TMT suggests that two types of defences are used in an attempt to transcend death symbolically – proximal and distal defences. The use of these spatial terms indicates how close to conscious awareness the defence allows knowledge of the CEE to be known. For instance, when the CEE remains an abstract problem, then proximal defences, such as literal denial, can be used. We can allow ourselves to hear the facts about the CEE, but literal denial is sufficient to keep death anxiety at bay. However, when we experience the CEE more directly, 'as conditions worsen and it becomes increasingly difficult to deny the effects of global climate change, more people switch over to distal defences' (Dickinson, 2009, p.38). Distal defences attempt to keep death anxiety deep in the unconscious and far away (Adams, 2016).

Four behavioural manifestations of distal defences are described by Dickinson (2009) and elaborated by Adams (2016). The first, transference idealisation, occurs when power and importance is projected onto an idealised other such as leaders, celebrities or a saviour of some description. Adams points to the common belief that technology or scientists will save us. It allows individuals to disavow their own responsibility for making the necessary changes in their everyday life and at the same time the passivity allows increasingly authoritarian governments to flourish (Adams, 2016).

The second manifestation is the drive for self-esteem through consumerism, the constant pre-occupation seen in Western cultures with the acquisition of goods and experiences. Consumerism provides a quick fix to any mounting anxiety (Adams, 2016) but paradoxically striving for self-esteem in this way contributes to the CEE and increases the threat posed by it (Dickinson, 2009).

Third is outgroup antagonism. This involves the splitting of others into good or bad groups and the identification of enemies 'upon whom problems are projected' (Adams, 2016, p.157). This can take the form of shifting blame onto others whilst denying personal responsibility and accountability. Adams makes the point that environmentalists are not immune to this form of defence (Adams, 2016).

Finally, the bolstering of existing worldviews is considered as a fourth distal defence, and Adams (2016) makes the point that this need not be destructive. For example, an environmental worldview can create meaning and purpose, thereby providing some ontological security. He also reminds us that worldviews need not be consistent and are often idiosyncratic.

Although the literature may bring slightly different nuances to the subject of psychological defences, there is consistency in the fundamental processes involved – splitting, projection, denial and disavowal. Additionally, Hoggett (2022, p.17) points out that 'the life of the mind and the life of society bear an uncanny resemblance. In all of us […] we can find an internal establishment'. In other words, we need to also consider the social and cultural forces at work which serve to maintain these individual psychological defences.

3.2.4 Social defences against anxiety

A growing body of literature engages with defences relating to the CEE as culturally and socially organised. In this section I will first discuss the key texts regarding socially constructed defences then move on to look specifically at literature that applies these ideas to socially constructed denial and disavowal of the CEE.

3.2.4.1 Social systems as a defence

In her seminal paper, *Social Systems as a Defense Against Anxiety*, Isabel Menzies-Lyth (Menzies Lyth, 1960) drew on psychoanalytic concepts to understand the conflicting and difficult emotions experienced by nurses in carrying out their day-to-day work with patients and their relatives. She described the powerful feelings of compassion and love, guilt and anxiety, hatred and resentment, and envy that this work can evoke in nurses. Menzies Lyth theorised that 'nurses [unconsciously] projected infantile phantasy-situations [greed, frustration, envy, violence and subsequent anxiety] into current work-situations' (Menzies Lyth, 1960, p.442) creating a mixture of objective reality and phantasy. In order to master the infantile anxieties, nurses need to master the objective reality situation. Menzies Lyth proposed that an organisation's structure and culture is determined by its members' psychological needs and that members then subsequently use this structure to protect against anxieties that could become unmanageable. In her study, various organisationally accepted practices were designed to keep anxieties at bay, although

these were not successful. Practices included the splitting of care into a series of tasks in order to avoid a relationship with the full patient, depersonalisation of the patient, setting clearly defined roles for nursing staff and the delegation upwards to senior nurses of responsibility for decisions.

As well as being a seminal piece of work on social defences against anxiety, Menzies Lyth's paper is particularly relevant for my study which includes a sample of therapists. There are similarities between the work of nurses and the work of therapists. For instance, both professions involve dealing with the suffering of others, a level of intimacy, care for the patient/client and dealing with issues which can be frightening or distressing. As such therapy can create similar stresses and anxieties to those experienced by nurses and social defences against anxiety may be present in the structure and culture of therapy. The therapy profession has become increasingly regulated over the last decade and I am interested in how therapists' responses to the CEE may be mediated by this.

3.2.4.2 Socially constructed silence

Eviatar Zerubavel in his book '*The Elephant in the Room: Silence and Denial in Everyday Life'* (2006) reminds us that denial in the form of blocking out, not noticing, forgetting or remaining silent are not just individual processes but are also a product of our social worlds. Social rules regarding what can be noticed, paid attention to and spoken about are internalised and govern our internal and external narratives. Zerubavel argues that we adhere to these rules in order to avoid pain and shame associated with rejection and alienation. He draws attention to the 'conspiracy' of 'mutual avoidance' involved in 'co-denial' (Zerubavel, 2006, p.47) and says,

> *'A conspiracy of silence presupposes discretion on the part of the non-producer of the information as well as the inattention on the part of its non-consumers. It is precisely the collaborative efforts of those who avoid mentioning the elephant in the room and those who correspondingly refrain from asking about it that make it a conspiracy' (Zerubavel, 2006, p.48)*

Zerubavel clearly outlines how such conspiracies of silence require a symmetry of relations, an unconscious or tacit agreement by one party not to speak or show and the other not to hear or see. Even more subtly, we may avoid being in a situation where we might have to speak or show or we may have to hear or see. Another tactic

which Zerubavel draws attention to is the way in which chatter is used to distract from the silence surrounding the elephant in the room, something he calls 'conspiracies of noise' (Zerubavel, 2006, p.52).

I am interested in how social rules regarding what is spoken about operate in the world of therapy and activism, specifically in relation to the CEE. For instance, what do therapists choose to notice and pay attention to in therapy sessions, and conversely, what do clients choose to talk about? In the world of activism, what is denied and avoided?

3.2.4.3 Socially constructed denial of the CEE

In relation to socially constructed denial of climate change, the sociologist Kari Norgaard's seminal study (Norgaard, 2011) of a community in Norway outlined the way in which cultural practices of attention, conversation rules and emotional norms keep disturbing feelings regarding the CEE at bay. These cultural practices are further maintained by broader political and economic structures such as a nation's history and economic situation, government policy and rhetoric and cultural identity. Norgaard's study demonstrated how socially constructed denial then acts to prevent people taking any action to deal with the problem. Instead, a double reality is constructed and maintained whereby disturbing knowledge about the CEE is kept separate from normal everyday life. As one of her participant's said, 'We live in one way, and we think in another. We learn to live in parallel' (Norgaard, 2011, p.5)

Staying with the idea that cultural practices can act as defences, Randall (2005) draws attention to three inter-connected cultural practices in Western culture that she suggests are relevant to understanding our collective defence against the reality of the crisis. The first is that of shopping which Randall suggests has become a leisure activity and an important part of social life. She argues that shopping is not just a means to an end but serves a defensive function. It is a denial that anything is wrong and the fact that everyone is doing it acts as a further comfort. The defence is maintained by the media that constantly bombards us with make-over programmes and advertising, all seducing us into further shopping. Randall argues that the destructive element of this activity – the environmental and human cost – is split off and seen in the shaming of those individuals who get into debt through an inability to control their desires and impulses for more material goods.

The second social movement Randall draws attention to is that of our increasingly risk-averse society with its tight controls and regulation over particular professional groups, particularly the helping professions such as teaching, social work and medicine. This is in stark contrast to the deregulation of financial institutions and other industries which has arguably caused environmental and social injustices, and significant economic problems. Randall argues that through a collective unconscious defence, anxiety caused by the consequences of deregulation is displaced onto the helping professions which are then over-regulated and often criticised for not doing enough. The pressure of being measured, managed and monitored when working in these professions is bound to cause additional anxiety to that already present due to the nature of the work.

3.2.4.4 Organised denialism

This form of climate change denial is not unconscious. It is perpetrated by those who wish to protect their economic interests particularly fossil fuel companies, mining and forestry companies, governments and right-wing media. This form of organised denial is termed denialism and is particularly prevalent in affluent countries such as the US, Canada, Australia and the UK (Dunlap and McCright, 2011). The aim of denialism is to persuade the public that either climate change is not happening, or it is not serious enough to warrant immediate action.

It is important to recognise that all these sociocultural defences dynamically combine with personal defences as well as with 'microcultures' of family and friends (Adams, 2016) in a pattern that will be unique to the individual.

3.2.5 The CEE as a hyperobject

Climate psychology has put psychological and social defences in a central position. However, Morton's concept of climate change as a hyperobject (Morton, 2013) offers further understanding of why it is difficult to face and grasp the reality of climate change. This idea emphasises the impossible-to-grasp nature of climate change. Hyperobjects have a huge extension in time and space that makes them historically beyond the range of human cognition. Morton says that hyperobjects 'massively outscale us' (Morton 2013, p.12). Yet, paradoxically, the idea of global warming as a whole cannot be accessed at a cognitive distance, rather it is 'right here in my social and experiential space' (Morton 2013, p.27), it sticks to everything – the

plastic food wrapping, the car journeys, heating the house, sunshine, using the microwave, the smell of bacon, waste disposal. The hyperobject is not immediately in front of us: our experiences of climate collapse are not the hyperobject itself, only its local direct manifestations. This makes facing the CEE extremely difficult.

3.3 Managing eco-distress

Several authors suggest that therapy and activism offer a way of managing eco-distress (Lawrance et al., 2022; Pihkala, 2022; Sarner, 2022; Budziszewska and Jonsson, 2021; Clayton, 2020). Both practices meet the definition of meaning-focussed coping (Ojala, 2012) that involves consciously employing ways to evoke positive feelings that can prevent negative feelings from creating low wellbeing. Talking about feelings and processing them by drawing on values, spiritual beliefs and existential goals in a therapeutic context validates and gives meaning and value to the feelings. In this way, affect can be made intelligent, understood and made easier to manage (Crociani-Windland and Hoggett, 2012). Similarly, engaging in activism creates feelings of community and belonging. Affectionate bonds are formed and personal identity is supported (Jasper, 1998), a sense of solidarity is experienced and hope engendered (Howard, 2022).

The literature regarding taking eco-distress to therapy or into activism will now be discussed in more detail.

3.3.1 Taking eco-distress to therapy

As discussed in section 3.1 on climate change emotions, some authors have made the point that the climate crisis is creating a mental health crisis (Lawrance et al., 2022; Weintrobe, 2021). Psychotherapy and counselling professions have begun to recognise the need to attend to eco-distress. Beginning in 2010 the American Psychological Association (APA) issued a report titled, '*Psychology and Global Climate Change: Addressing a Multi-faceted Phenomenon and Set of Challenges'* urging psychologists to take climate change seriously anticipating a range of psychological impacts (American Psychological Association, 2010). Since then, several psychological organisations have similarly called for increased attention on the mental health impacts of the climate crisis. In the UK, professional organisations such as the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP), the UK Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP) and the British Psychological Society (BPS)

have run CPD events, issued special editions of their journals (BACP, 2021; BPS, 2020; UKCP, 2016) and some have even made statements declaring a climate emergency (Royal Society of Psychiatrists, 2021). A recent report by UKCP (Scott, 2022) suggests that because of their skills and expertise, psychotherapists 'have a fundamental role to play' in supporting people to build resilience and a sense of hope in the face of the climate crisis (Scott, 2022, p.31) and Allured (2022, p.341) declares that psychoanalysis is 'a method for our times'. Other authors urge more strongly that therapy has a responsibility (Randall, 2005), an 'imperative' (Silva and Coburn, 2023, p.420), an 'obligation' (Kassouf, 2017, p.142) even a duty (Li et al., 2022) to play a part in the collective engagement with the CEE. It is, therefore, timely to consider the role of psychotherapy and counselling in supporting individuals to manage eco-distress, and its readiness and suitability to do this.

One commonly given rationale for engaging in therapy as a means of managing eco-distress is that by recognising psychological defences and working through difficult and painful feelings and emotions, we can become better able to face and live with the reality of the climate crisis. For example, Randall (2009) focusses particularly on grief and loss, applying Worden's grief framework (Worden, 2015) to the losses associated with the CEE. She suggests that working through these stages requires 'support structures that facilitate the process of mourning and provide containment for the anxieties that will inevitably be revealed' (Randall, 2009, p.126). This need for containment of climate-related emotions is similarly highlighted by the Climate Psychology Alliance (2022), who suggest that psychologists and therapists should 'build strong containers that allow the expression and exploration of their emotions without collapsing under it or turning away' (Climate Psychology Alliance, 2022, online). Certainly, people experiencing forms of eco-distress have reported finding therapy helpful when the therapist validates their feelings rather than pathologising them, and supports them to gain a deeper understand of their responses to the CEE (Sarner, 2022). Another important reason for processing climate distress is that it can then be harnessed for some kind of action and social change (Dodds, 2021; Seaman, 2016; Randall, 2005).

Despite anecdotal accounts of clients presenting with climate anxiety or distress (Aspey, 2021; Rust, 2020; Bednarek, 2019), and predictions that this will increase (Croasdale et al. 2023; Clayton et al. 2017) the literature suggests that currently

clients do not often bring eco-distress to therapy in a direct way, particularly if the therapist does not overtly advertise themselves as willing and able to work with these issues. A recent UK Survey of mental health professionals showed that they perceived an increase in the number of clients mentioning climate change as impacting on their mental health compared to five years ago (Croasdale et al. 2023). However, although the prevalence was perceived to be increasing, the numbers were still relatively low, with less than 25 % of clients mentioning climate change in this way.

Seaman (2016) surveyed 160 US therapists and found that almost two thirds of respondents said their clients either never or rarely made a passing comment about climate change, and only 14.4% of respondents said that clients had discussed climate change in an emotionally significant way. In choosing to distinguish between passing comments and emotionally significant conversations Seaman is drawing attention to a key dynamic in the therapeutic exchange. The decision of what topic to focus on and explore further often lies with the therapist. In her study, Seaman concluded that participants own internal responses to climate change are likely to impact on the therapeutic relationship when clients bring the subject up. Respondents reported feeling anxious, fearful, sad and angry themselves and this is likely to influence how they respond to clients. They may avoid exploring the topic for fear of evoking their own feelings, or conversely, inappropriately maintain a discussion about climate change with the client in order to rid themselves of their anxiety.

Although clients may not come to therapy explicitly because of eco-distress, some authors see individual presenting issues to be interconnected with wider social and cultural issues, including the CEE. For instance, Bodnar (2008) argues that different client issues may ‘depict an unbalanced society…. enacting the larger systemic shift between humans and nature’ (Bodnar, 2008, p.488). She draws on clinical material to highlight the way in which clients develop problematic behaviours such as excessive drinking, drug use and overworking as a means to obliterate deeper feelings of grief and loss associated with the natural environment, as well as internal conflicts. Similarly, Rust (2020, p.89) argues that ‘Our relationships with the more-than-human world are woven into, and inseparable from, relationships with self, family, culture and the earth’ and illustrates with clinical material how clients’ personal histories and their relationship with the natural world are inter-connected. She shows

how starting in one place, such as exploring a client's relationship with another person, can lead to the processing of feelings relating to the client's relationship to the more-than-human, and vice versa. The inter-connection is a web of relationships that needs to be disentangled for a fuller understanding to be gained and potential change to occur. Maintaining an individualistic perspective maintains a sense of powerlessness in the face of wider social and political issues, such as the CEE and Weintrobe (2021) suggests that we can only dismantle the broader culture of uncare by working through painful emotions.

3.3.1.1 Therapy needs to adapt

There is much in the literature that suggests therapy and therapists will need to adapt in order to meet the psychological and emotional needs of people impacted by the CEE. Some argue that since the CEE can be considered a 'wicked problem' (Morton, 2013, p.135) – highly complex, entangled and interdependent – a complete overhaul of key ideas and values within the mental health field is needed (Armstrong and Pratt-Boyden, 2021).

Several authors active in the area of climate psychology have commented on the lack of leadership within the psych professions in relation to the CEE (Mowat, 2022; Aspey, 2021; Kassouf, 2017). In a recent article for the BACP magazine, Linda Aspey, a psychotherapeutic counsellor, argues that the psychotherapeutic profession has been slow to respond and is not yet prepared for this. She raises questions about what needs to change (Aspey, 2021). She includes comments from several well-known therapists active in the area of climate distress whom she interviewed for the article:

> *'We still show little sign of waking up and accepting what has been described as the pivotal psychological reality of our time'*
>
> *''everything must change – that includes us too. James Hillman said, "We've had 100 years of psychotherapy and the world is getting worse", and that begs the question, how have we colluded with that?'*
>
> *'A lot of counselling is very much focussed on the personal. Whereas this is something existential, environmental and collective – we don't always know how to move between those spaces'*
> *(Aspey, 2021, pp.18-19)*

Aspey acknowledges that therapists may struggle to hold environmental issues in mind if the client is not bringing these up in a direct way. She also suggests that fear of meeting their own feelings about the CEE may be at the root of therapists' reluctance to open up this subject with clients. The need to remain detached in order to support the client is also another factor.

A small study by Silva and Coburn (2022) involving semi-structured interviews with therapists showed that all but one participant was aware of an avoidance on the part of therapists to engage with the subject of climate change with clients and that this was mediated by the constraints inherent within the therapeutic modality the therapist was working in. The therapists in the study all expressed powerful feelings and internal conflicts relating to the CEE hence I would suggest that unconscious process may also have been present which the study did not seek to elucidate. For instance, in what way did the therapists defend against their own anxieties when working with clients? In what way do therapists and clients collude in a defensive dynamic?

As well as avoidance in the therapy room, there is evidence that avoidance occurs at a more organisational and cultural level within the therapy profession. For instance, Mowat's (2022) study of therapists found that conversations about the CEE were absent in staff rooms and in supervision, and the lack of specific training for working with the CEE, has been raised by several authors (Mowat, 2022; Aspey, 2021).

3.3.1.2 Therapists need to become 'climate aware'

Sally Weintrobe has written extensively about disavowal, the unconscious defence of turning away from the reality of the CEE (Weintrobe, 2021, 2020, 2013a, 2013b). She has also suggested that much of this disavowal is social, a result of our Western individualistic culture, which she calls a culture of uncare (Weintrobe, 2021) and which serves to maintain us in a 'climate bubble' – the system of disavowal which minimises the level of disturbance felt and the moral injury (Weintrobe, 2020, online). Weintrobe warns that as we inevitably emerge from our climate bubble, we are likely to experience shock. We are likely to feel vulnerable, angry, traumatised, shamed, afraid and so on. This background collective dis-ease will be the context in which both client and therapist are working.

Weintrobe urges therapists to become 'climate aware' (Weintrobe, 2021). More than a simple cognitive awareness, Weintrobe warns that becoming climate aware involves difficult and painful emotional work. It involves dealing with that which cannot be repaired and the prospect of an unsafe and unliveable world. It is likely to feel unbearable at times.

3.3.1.3 Alternative therapeutic spaces

Drawing on experiences of mental health 'survivor' activists who have had traumatic experiences of NHS mental healthcare and orientate themselves towards socioenvironmental concerns and a collective understanding of wellbeing, Armstrong and Pratt-Boyden (2021) suggest that the CEE is a collective and social issue, hence

> *'might force psychiatry to rethink some of its fundamental ideas and ways of working, including clinical boundaries, understandings of psychopathology and ways of organising' (p.227)*

Models of mental illness need to be more flexible. In particular they suggest that exploring experiences and feelings in group settings, 'where the unpredictability and uncertainty of distress is given space' (Armstrong and Pratt-Boyden, 2021, p.229), where the social causes of distress can also be fully acknowledged and where not knowing how to fix things can be allowed, would be more helpful than traditional models of managing mental health issues. In Seaman's (2016) study, over 40% of respondents whose clients had either mentioned climate change in passing or had emotionally significant conversations said they saw no improvement in their client's anxiety regarding climate change following therapy. Perhaps individual therapy is not the best context for talking about eco-distress.

Other authors have similarly emphasised the importance of expressing and processing difficult climate emotions in shared spaces where mutual support can be drawn upon (Belkin, 2022; Randall, 2005). Hamilton (2019) describes various group and community-based approaches to working with the emotional responses to the CEE. She suggests that these practices, which she calls Emotionally Reflexive Methodologies (ERM's), can facilitate the expression, containment and processing of difficult and painful emotions associated with the CEE. Although the ERM's she reviews have different elements within them, they share the feature of being group

based, creating a space for reflexive practice and being held by a trained facilitator. Participants gain a sense of resilience through the interconnectedness with others and the opportunity to 'link inner world with outer action' (Hamilton, 2019, p.166). With Zerubavel's idea of socially constructed silence in mind, it is also possible that in a group setting the group acts collectively as 'silence breakers' and this may offset feelings of fear, shame and isolation sufficiently for members to name the unnameable and make the issues discussable. Individual therapy may not be the best context for some people to talk about their distress in relation to the CEE.

Although there is an increasing view in the literature that therapy may need to adapt to meet the needs of the CEE, there is little guidance for therapists on how to work in the room with clients for whom climate distress may be relevant. Similarly, there is very little literature that examines 'the collision of therapist and client experience of the impacts of climate crisis constellates "in the room"' (Silva and Coburn, 2022, p.421). This study aims to begin to address that gap.

3.4 The role of activism

As previously discussed, activism has been advocated as an approach to managing eco-distress. In order to review the relevant literature related to eco-activism, I will first begin very broadly by considering how we understand groups from a psychoanalytic perspective. I will then narrow down to the literature on social movements, activism and protests in general before finally focussing on what has been written about eco-activism specifically.

3.4.1 The group

Wilfred Bion has contributed significantly to theories of group dynamics. In particular, his theory concerning unconscious group dynamics has been widely influential (French and Simpson, 2010) and is relevant when considering the findings from the eco-activist participants in my study. Bion proposed two types of group mentalities – the working group mentality (W) and the basic assumption mentality (ba) (Bion, 1961). The latter is characterised by strong unconscious feelings which the group wishes to avoid or displace. The former, is characterised by the ability to manage tensions and contain emotions such that it can function effectively towards its purpose. Bion proposed that these two forms co-exist and are neither stable or permanent, although one form of mentality is dominant at any one

time. When a group is operating with ba mentality it can develop a pseudo-purposefulness, an ‘as-if’ feeling that work is being done. However, the true function of this ‘work’ is to avoid difficult emotions and can be considered as ‘activity but without reflexivity’ (French and Simpson, 2010, p.1868). By contrast the group operating with a W mentality is concerned with reality in the form of a ‘demand for action inherent in [the] underlying purpose’ (French and Simpson, 2010, p.1866) together with the emotional experiences related to the groups’ purpose and to the relationships between group members.

Bion (1961) identified three types of basic-assumption mentalities. These were the dependent mentality (baD), the fight-flight mentality (baF) and the pairing mentality (baP). He described the underlying emotional tone of each of these modes of group thinking and behaviour. When in baD mentality, the group seeks an idealised leader to give the answers and is characterised by feelings of inadequacy and frustration. In baF mentality the group is characterised by an ‘us and them’ attitude and demands loyalty, courage and self-sacrifice from its members. The group operating in baP mentality holds hope for the arrival of a saviour/solution produced by the pairing of two of its members. These categorisations of modes of thinking and feeling, mentalities, are not to be thought of as rigidly fixed and Bion makes the point that group mentality can switch rapidly and repeatedly. However, they serve to describe underlying unconscious modes of thinking and feeling within a group at any one time. Bion (1961) suggested that guilt and depression are more prevalent in a baD mentality, Messianic hope in baP mentality and anger and hate, or paralysis in baF mentality.

French and Simpson (2010) have extended Bion’s work to propose that work group mentality can also be characterised by parallel modes of thinking, feelings and behaving. They suggest that Bion’s dependence, pairing and fight-flight categorisations can be considered as forms of interaction within the group. These interactions can either serve to usefully further the group’s purpose and task (WD, WP, WF) or be used unconsciously by the group as a defence against difficult and painful emotional work (baD, baP, baF).

In my study of eco-activists, I am interested in whether these mentalities are evident. What modes of thinking and feeling are discernible in participant narratives. What

might I experience in the countertransference that may indicate unconscious basic assumption mentalities?

3.4.2 Social movements, activism and protests

There is a large body of sociological and political literature regarding social movements, activism and protests and for the purposes of this review I will focus on that which considers the role and relevance of emotions and feelings in this area. Towards the end of the 1990's there was an increased interest from scholars in the emotional aspect of social movements and activism with authors arguing for the centrality of emotions in social movements and protests (Gould, 2002; Jasper 1998).

Jasper (1998) distinguished transitory responses to external events, such as anger and grief, from underlying affects such as loyalty or hatred which are likely to influence transitory responses. Moral shock as a reaction to an external event has emotional power; it can lead either to a paralysis or it can be mobilised and channelled into political activity. He also distinguished those emotions that are formed outside the group and that may be motivators for joining particular movements with preferred organisational forms and tactics, and those which occur within the group and may be factors that maintain group cohesion, drive action or lead to a group's breakdown. Developing affective ties with other members of the group is an important motivator for remaining politically active and activism can become a pleasurable experience.

Jasper's theoretical discussion relates to social movements and protests in general, however, his concepts can readily be applied to the specific case of eco-activism. For instance, love for the natural world, fear of social breakdown due to the climate crisis, mistrust or hatred of those seen as perpetrators of ecological damage could be pre-existing affects that may explain why individuals join a particular protest or group. Once an individual has joined an eco-activist group underlying affects of love and affectional bonds for fellow members, loyalty, shared identity, trust and respect could all serve to maintain group membership. Responses to external events will be shaped by these underlying affects and could include shock, anger and grief at environmental reports or government policies and/or inaction.

Although Jasper offers a very useful framework for conceptualising emotions involved in protests, and importantly argues for emotions to be given a more prominent place in our understanding of social movements and protests, the

complexities of the processes remains little understood (Brown and Pickerill, 2009). For instance, Jasper does not venture into the realm of unconscious feelings and defences. For this, we have to look to the psycho-social literature.

More recently, Lawson (2021) has integrated an autoethnographic account of her experience of being involved in activism over many years with a sociopolitical and cultural perspective. In addition she considers the unconscious forces that govern activist behaviours. Lawson's key point is that activist groups are entangled in the very systems they are seeking to change. This means that they are likely to unconsciously recreate the same systems of hierarchies, bullying, abuse of self and others, racism and fight/flight responses within their own movements. She also makes the point that inner and outer worlds are treated as separate and unconnected. Activists are often unaware of how their past traumas may be being replayed through their activism. One of the main mechanisms she highlights is 'over-there thinking' (Lawson, 2021, p.14), the tendency to project blame onto others and see the problem as external to themselves without acknowledging that we all have the capacity to engage in the undesirable behaviour they are fighting against. Lawson contests that activists often overestimate how different they are from those they are trying to influence 'we are right, and the other people are wrong….they are asleep…they do not 'get it'' (Lawson, 2021, p.36).

Lawson describes 'common habits' of activists (Lawson, 2021, p.65) that are a result of being entangled and shaped by their socio-cultural contexts and separating inner and outer worlds. She links the tendency for activists to feel they have to prove themselves, be doing good works and making sacrifices to a cultural Protestantism and wider Christianity. Furthermore, she links our individualistic culture to the feeling activists often have that they have to do it all by themselves. In these ways activists derive a sense of self-worth, prestige and identity but when taken to extremes this becomes a form of martyrdom, a saviour complex, which can become the culture within an activist movement. The potential cost of such extreme engagement is burnout. Lawson (2021) highlights the parallels between the extractive culture that is creating problems of the CEE and social injustice, and many activists seeing themselves as a bottomless resource. In other words we internalise our sociocultural environment as well as shape it.

A recommendation that is made by several authors (Lawson, 2021; Brown and Pickerill, 2009) is that activists need to develop reflexivity and an awareness of what is happening in their inner worlds – their feelings, thoughts and emotions – as well as their focus on outer world problems. Authors argue that this is important to identify emotional needs and to be able to sustain activism. However, this is often at odds with their self-identity and an unrealistic perfect standard held by activists which encompasses a masculine form of competitiveness where there is little space for emotional reflexivity. Authors warn that failure to engage in such reflexivity can lead to burn out.

These literatures on activism come predominantly from a sociological perspective and although there has been a push for the inner life of emotions to be explored in order to understand social movements, the literature lacks a deeper psychological perspective that would also take into account unconscious individual processes. Although we are all moulded by sociocultural factors, there are also individual psychological factors that will limit our responses. In other words, we need to integrate psychoanalytic literature with that of sociological studies of social movements to obtain a fuller picture of the various processes that are involved in activism.

3.4.3 Eco-activism

Moving to the literature concerned with eco-activism specifically, Scheuerman (2022) has provided a useful comparison of two main approaches to eco-activism, that of non-violent civil disobedience (NVCD) and a more militant block and disrupt (BD) approach. The NVCD approach includes movements such as Extinction Rebellion (XR), Fridays for a Future (FFF) and Sunrise in the United States. It is characterised by 'strict civility, conscientiousness, nonviolence, publicity, and respect for the law' (Scheuerman, 2022, p.793). The strategy of such movements is based on creating mass public appeal and frames taking action as a 'conscientious moral obligation' (Scheuerman, 2022, p.796). Furthermore, it 'depicts criminal punishment as morally and personally transformative' (Scheuerman, p.797). As Scheuerman points out, however, despite the endearing faith of its followers, the success of a NVCD approach has been over-rated and followers often face disappointment and burnout.

BD by contrast favours sabotage and ‘writes off the prospect of meaningful political reform’ (Scheuerman, 2022, p.793) and condones covert, legally evasive and potentially violent actions. Followers of this approach tend to be anti-capitalist and often hold anarchist or Marxist opinions and values. They can be scathing towards the NVDC approach, seeing it as ‘too little, too late’ (Scheuerman, 2022, p.802) and instead favour acting to stop the causes of the CEE ‘here and now’ (Scheuerman, 2022, p.802). They view the CEE as justification for their ‘militant, potentially violent resistance’ (Scheuerman, 2022, p.802) and their narrative has a martial quality to it. They act secretly in small groups to carry out clandestine attacks on targets they see as being directly responsible for the CEE.

Although Scheuerman’s analysis is primarily political offering a critique of the efficacy of each approach in bringing about changes needed to address the CEE, it is useful in providing a lens through which to consider the findings of my study. In particular, whether there is any distinction amongst the eco-activists sample and whether these two approaches are discernible in the narratives. How are feelings and emotions experienced by followers of these two approaches?

Even though activism offers a meaning-focussed approach to cope with eco-distress, Randall (2005) suggests that eco-activists are still likely to experience emotional disturbance. She theorises that the majority of the population unconsciously projects their collective guilt for the CEE onto the minority activist population who then shoulder its burden. Activists then use particular defences of repression and ‘an overdeveloped superego’ (Randall, 2005, p.174) which can lead to feelings of loneliness. It can also lead to a sense of taking the moral high ground and the worthiness of self-sacrifice. Randall posits four possible routes that activists may take as a result of this dynamic. They can advocate impossible extremes and become a ‘ferocious, moralizing puritan’ and ‘satisfactions of masochistic self-denial are embraced’ (Randall, 2005, p.175). Another possible route is for the activist to internalise the guilt and drive themselves to do more and more until they eventually collapse from burnout. A third route is to identify with the role of a superhero, an eco-warrior, which can ease the guilt and maintain a sense of morale. The fourth route Randall posits is that of retreat. The activist retreats to an idealised past when man lived in harmony with nature. Although their guilt is soothed by the purity of their lifestyle, they risk becoming isolated from mainstream society.

Hoggett and Randall (2018) conducted a small study focussed on the emotional responses to climate change of environmental activists compared to climate scientists. They highlighted the importance of the social context and culture of each group in how emotions were managed, or not. What is of interest here is the study indicates that eco-activists were more emotionally literate than the scientist community using 'more reflexive forms of emotion work' (Hoggett and Randall (2018, p.238) to process and manage difficult emotions associated with the CEE. They were more aware of their vulnerability and engaged in self-care. This is at odds with the literature on activists in general. It suggests that there may be something different about eco-activist culture. In contrast the scientific community was seen to be more defended. Social defences against anxiety were present such as having a culture of seeing science as neutral without responsibility for the consequences of new knowledge and specialisation leading to not having to see the whole picture. There are parallels with the therapy profession here, for example where therapists are expected to adopt a neutral stance in relation to their client's issues. There were however hints of social defences against anxiety being present in the activist group too. For instance, some activists mentioned overwork and non-emotionality when working in NGO's and the setting up of rigid boundaries and idealising the movement.

3.4.3.1 Eco-activism to manage eco-distress

Worry and anxiety about the CEE has been identified as a positive motivation for engaging in activism (Ojala et al., 2021) and in a reciprocal relationship, activism has been suggested as a way to ease eco-distress by building emotional resilience through an enhanced sense of agency, fostering hope and relational connectedness, and adjusting to new ways of living (Longman et al., 2023; Lawrance et al., 2022; Coppolla, 2021; Clayton, 2020). In the coping literature climate activism could be seen as problem-focussed (Ojala, 2012), an attempt to solve the problem. However, Ojala (2012) proposes that engaging in collective action is more usefully understood as meaning-focussed coping because the CEE is not denied or avoided but positive emotions are activated which enables people to bear the distress. For instance, personal reflections of being involved in activism report enhanced feelings of individual and collective efficacy (Knight, 2020), an increased sense of meaning and direction (Coates, 2020) and feelings of hopefulness and solidarity (Howard, 2022).

Social support gained through engaging in activism has also been seen as a protective factor against low wellbeing (Ojala et al., 2021).

Taking action need not mean joining activist movements such as XR or becoming involved in large scale protests. It has been shown that even engaging in individual pro-environmental behaviours, such as purchasing environmentally-friendly products or cycling rather than driving, can also benefit mental wellbeing whilst at the same time benefitting the environment (Lawrance et al., 2022). However, it has been argued that citizen activism is the most effective way of bringing about change through pressure on governments and organisations, since individual changes in behaviour alone are insufficient to solve the crisis (Ockwell, 2009). This is taken to a particularly poignant point by doctors who feel that they can save more lives through political activism as part of XR Doctors than by their individual actions as medics (Knapp, 2022).

However, there are also words of caution about seeing action as a means of managing distress caused by the CEE. Firstly, opportunities to channel anxiety into action are not equally available. In some parts of the world activism runs the risk of death (Greenfield, 2022) and people are preoccupied with basic means of survival such as clean air and water, and food security. Even in the more affluent Global North, disadvantaged sectors of the population facing social inequalities such as poverty and poor health will need to focus on securing basic needs rather than getting involved in activism, even if they were concerned about the CEE. Additionally, seeing activism as a means of alleviating distress could reinforce the notion of eco-distress as a pathology to be cured. It also risks disillusionment and disappointment if the action lacks positive outcomes, and may worsen mental wellbeing for people who are severely distressed (Clayton, 2020). Action without concurrent attention to long term emotional resilience can lead to a worsening of eco-distress and ultimately burnout (Coppolla, 2021).

3.4.3.2 The problem of burnout

The risk of activist burn out is well documented (Lawson, 2021; Hogget and Randall, 2018; Brown and Pickerill, 2009). Mental Health UK defines burnout as ‘a state of physical and emotional exhaustion’ and lists the common signs of burnout as:

- Feeling tired or drained most of the time
- Feeling helpless, trapped and/or defeated
- Feeling detached/alone in the world
- Having a cynical/negative outlook
- Self-doubt
- Procrastinating and taking longer to get things done
- Feeling overwhelmed

Brown and Pickerill (2009) offer an explanation for why activism carries this risk. They suggest that there is a socially constructed 'perfect standard' for being an activist which is unrealistic. They describe an activist identity that encompasses values of total commitment to the cause and personal sacrifice. There can even sometimes be a culture of competition between activists in a group – who is the 'best' activist. Buying into this identity can lead to physical, emotional and even financial strains that eventually lead to burnout.

Hoggett and Randall (2018) describe a possible activist journey which begins with an epiphany as the person realises the seriousness of the problem. There then follows a period of immersion where the individual becomes heavily involved in activism and spends a great deal of time reading and thinking about the issue. This can lead to a point of crisis or burnout where the person experiences the urgency of the climate crisis and at the same time feels over-worked, over-whelmed, disillusioned or disempowered. Increasingly activists are recognising these risks and the fourth stage of the journey which Hoggett and Randall (2018) describe is resolution. In order to move out of burnout activists find a balance between their activism and normal life, they find a sense of proportion that works for them. When engaged in activism they take the time to reflect on feelings and they also find some distance from the knowledge of the climate crisis so that there is a reduction in the pre-occupation with the information.

3.5 A model for coping with the CEE

Panu Pihkala, a leading Finnish expert and author on the subject of eco-anxiety and climate emotions, has developed a model (shown in Figure 2) in an attempt to simplify the complexity surrounding this field of study (Pihkala, 2022). Drawing on extensive literature via a narrative review, Pihkala takes an interdisciplinary approach to describe the processes involved as individuals encounter the CEE.

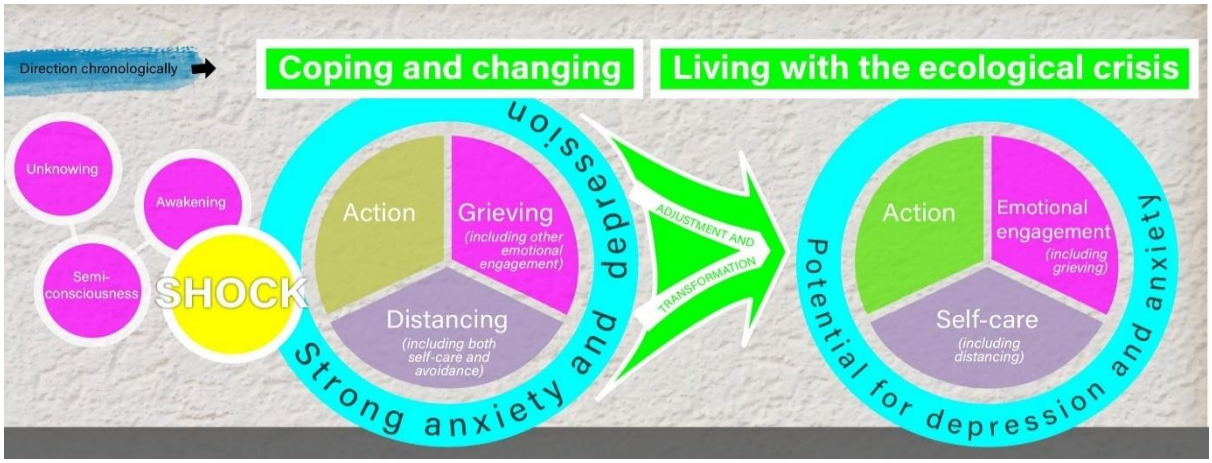


Figure 2 – Model for coping and living with the CEE (Pihkala, 2022)
Reproduced with permission

Pihkala's narrative review brings together much of the literature I have summarised above. However, he makes an important contribution in two ways which are particularly pertinent for my study. Firstly, he emphasises the complex interplay of individual and social factors involved and the fluctuation and oscillation which occurs throughout between feelings and defences. The processes of engaging actively with the CEE in some way ('action'), experiencing climate emotions ('grieving') and avoiding distressing feelings ('distancing') are in dynamic relationship as individuals and groups move between them. Secondly through a process of 'adjustment and transformation' these three processes subtly become more conscious and balanced. For example, climate emotions are consciously worked with and processed, and distancing is engaged with as part of self-care rather than as unconscious disavowal. Pihkala (2022) describes adjustment and transformation as something that,

> *'happens over time; people describe it as something they one day notice has happened, rather than any single moment […] Instead of being something totally different, this new condition includes more balance in life and more awareness of one's response dynamics' (p.37)*

Transformation and adjustment itself involves acceptance, realistic hope, meaning-focussed coping and the idea of post-traumatic growth. The risk of strong anxiety and depression reactions are reduced as adjustment and transformation occurs and the emphasis shifts from 'coping with' the CEE to 'living with'.

Pihkala's model provides a useful framework with which to hold the complexity of factors and processes involved in climate emotions. My study seeks to explore more deeply the oscillations and fluctuations, and what might support adjustment and transformation.

Summary

The psychosocial literature reviewed in Chapter 2 suggests that the dominant Western culture together with psychological and social factors has led us to the climate and ecological crisis. In this chapter, we see that facing the reality of this can trigger powerful and distressing emotions which we consciously and unconsciously defend against, as individuals, communities and societies. Disavowal and socially constructed denial work together to keep felt knowledge out of everyday awareness – we simultaneously know and don't know.

The commonly used umbrella term of eco-anxiety belies the diversity and complexity of the feelings and emotions experienced and for that reason, I prefer to use the term eco-distress. There is a complex inter-relationship between individual and sociocultural factors that influence what we feel about the CEE, what we express to others and what we avoid feeling. Coping with eco-distress is challenging and it has been suggested that therapy and engaging in activism can help. However, it seems that therapy practice needs to adapt before it is ready to work in this way and activists are at risk of burnout and overwhelm without sufficient emotional work that allows them to gain more self-awareness.

There are several gaps in the literature that have helped me to form my research questions. Firstly, although both therapy and activism are cited as ways of coping, the literature regarding each of these options is offered as a separate path of enquiry. This has led me to frame my project with a dual perspective. I am interested in how feelings, emotions and defences work in both of these contexts. What can be learnt from each that might enhance the other? Is there a shared psycho-social space that is neither purely therapy or purely activism but has elements of both?

Secondly, a deeper understanding of eco-distress that considers how an individual's personal biography relates to their experience of distress, the defences they use and the coping strategies employed is still sparse. Furthermore, how this in turn

influences personal agency and the decision to act is unclear. I hope to contribute some understanding in this regard.

Thirdly, the role of cultural practices of the therapy profession specifically in constructing social defences has not been explored empirically and this study attempts to open this conversation further. For instance, what is present in the structure and culture of the profession that enables individual practitioners to maintain disavowal? How do the social rules of therapy dictate what is paid attention to, talked about and not talked about? In the therapy room, what happens between therapist and client when the topic of CEE is present in the field and when their respective experiences of the CEE collide?

Fourth, only a small amount of empirical work has been undertaken with eco-activists that seeks to understand the cultural practices that allow disavowal and I hope to contribute further to this understanding. What are the social rules in eco-activist communities that dictate what is paid attention to, talked about and not talked about? How do different approaches such as NVCD and BD influence how feelings, emotions and defences operate?

Finally, there is very little practical guidance for how therapists can address and work with eco-distress. How could therapists adapt their practice to work with these issues? What sort of interventions might be helpful? What is their role in these times?

To recap, my research questions are summarised as follows:

1. How are feelings regarding the CEE experienced in therapy and activism? Where are the similarities, differences and gaps?
2. What unconscious defences are employed in therapy and activism to manage difficult feelings? In what way are they helpful or unhelpful?
3. What do we understand about the task of therapy and activism in these times?
4. Are the current models, contexts and tools of therapy relevant for supporting individuals to deal with the emotional impact of the CEE? What else is helpful?

In all of these questions, I am particularly interested in what is unconscious in the context of therapy and activism. This dictates my methodology which I deal with in the following chapter.

Chapter 4 – Methodology and Methods: A Psycho-Social Methodology

Introduction

Based on the literature I have reviewed there is a strong case to research the issues raised by my research questions using a psycho-social approach. In this chapter I build the case further in terms of how to do this in a way that is congruent with my research questions and the gaps I have identified in the literature. I describe the methods used, namely free association narrative interviews (FANI) and the biographical narrative interview method (BNIM). I lead the reader through the fieldwork process including selecting my sample, ethical considerations, interviewing and analysis of the data. I end the chapter with a critique of the method. Firstly, I will remind the reader of my research questions.

4.1 My research questions

As discussed in Chapter 1, my research questions have evolved and emerged through an iterative process. My initial enquiry was broad –

> How is our relationship with the natural world expressed through selfhood, subjective identities and in particular through the sense of an 'ecological self'?
>
> How is this presented in therapeutic and activist contexts?

As I read the extant literature and began to interview my participants, this broad aim was refined to the following set of questions which directed further interviews, my discussion and eventual conclusions:

1. How are feelings regarding the CEE experienced in therapy and activism? Where are the similarities, differences and gaps?
2. What unconscious defences are employed in therapy and activism to manage difficult feelings? In what way are they helpful or unhelpful?
3. Are the current models, contexts and tools of therapy relevant for supporting individuals to deal with the emotional impact of the CEE? What else is helpful?
4. What do we understand about the task of therapy and activism in these times?

4.2 The rationale for a psycho-social methodology

As outlined in Chapter 1, my overarching qualitative approach is critical realism and contextualism. I assume that 'a real and knowable world […] sits 'behind' the subjective and socially-located knowledge [I] can access'. (Braun and Clarke, 2013 p.27) and my aim is 'to understand factors influencing and effects of particular meanings or representations expressed' (Braun and Clarke, 2013 p.21).

In addition, I assume that we (myself and my research participants) do not have full access to reality and hence do not take any data at 'face value'; not all material will be available to conscious thought. Participants will not fully know why they may think, feel or act in certain ways, an issue termed the 'transparent self problem' (Hollway and Jefferson, 2013 p.3). The participant may not be willing to tell me, a stranger, their complete truth; this is termed the 'transparent account problem' (Hollway and Jefferson, 2013 p.3). I come from a psychoanalytically informed practice that sees individuals as defended. In other words, my research subjects and I will be invested in certain constructions of reality in order to defend against internal conflicts and suffering which are experienced psychically as threats to the self and cause anxiety. Defences used by us will be typically unconscious and not initially available to conscious thought and discourse. They instead have to be inferred and interpreted.

It can be seen from the broad themes of this project and my research questions outlined above that there is both a psychological and a social perspective. As well as individual affect, feelings and emotions, I am also interested in the sociocultural practices and narratives in which individual experience is embedded. I agree with Stenner (2014) – my research questions would be 'very poorly posed when abstracted from their cultural, societal and historical settings, and … these settings are poorly understood in abstraction from the living, experiencing human beings whose actions make their reproduction and transformation possible' (Stenner, 2014, p.206).

Similarly, Frosh (2003) argues that the individual is to be found in the social and the social within the individual. In other words, a mutually constructing dynamic not all of which is conscious – 'the social is psychically invested and the psychological is socially formed, neither has an essence apart from the other' (Frosh, 2003 p.1555).

Furthermore, the way in which identities are constructed and reconstructed is through social discourses which are 'invested with personal meaning and unfold into biographic narratives' (Alexandrov, 2009, p.41). In other words, social and political discourses and narratives regarding the natural world and the CEE will construct subjective experiences and personal biographies will influence how these discourses are received.

Social factors such as gender, race and class affect our personal experiences including our experiences of social and political events such as Brexit (Spiliopoulos and Timmons, 2023) and the COVID-19 pandemic (Irizar et al., 2023) for instance. Organisational culture also influences our behaviours and practices (Menzies-Lyth, 1960). Sehrbrock (2021) argues for a 'social thirdness' to be integrated into clinical psychotherapy in order to fully understand intersubjective meanings. He says, 'The DNA of experience is altered and biased by the systems within which it operates' (Sehrbrock, 2021, p.9). When two people meet, it is not only a meeting of minds but a meeting of their social worlds.

We need to also consider how to research the unconscious aspect of the topic. As has been discussed in Chapter 3, several authors have considered the role of unconscious defences that are employed by all of us to mitigate the distress that facing the environmental crisis evokes. A psycho-social approach is one which offers this possibility since it researches 'beneath the surface' and 'beyond the purely discursive' (Clarke and Hogget, 2009, p.2). Unconscious processes within the research will construct the ways in which reality is perceived, the way in which the research context is constructed and the ways in which the research data is generated and analysed (Clarke and Hogget, 2009). Hunt (1989) says, 'the unconscious communications which are negotiated in the research encounter affect empathy and rapport. They therefore play a role in the materials that subjects reveal and researchers grasp' (Hunt, 1989, p.27).

A psychosocial approach is concerned with the inter-relationship between personal interiority and outer sociocultural worlds, the psyche and the sociocultural. However, although it aids clarity to distinguish inner from outer for the purposes of discussion, it is important not to view these spheres as separate worlds. As Stenner says, 'the 'inner world', from before day one, is populated, as it were, by relations to others,

and hence is better understood, less as a distinct and separate sphere, than as a fold within the 'outer world' (Stenner, 2014, p.207).

4.2.1 The psychoanalytic interview

In order to explore the unconscious intra-psychic dynamic between anxieties and defences, the feelings, thoughts, sensations and processes which are 'beneath the surface', methods of data collection need to facilitate access to the unconscious, and data analysis needs to incorporate processes for interpretation which can infer the unconscious. The process of psychoanalysis does just this. In addition psychoanalysis and psychosocial research are both concerned with meaning making (Bondi, 2013), therefore there is a rationale for drawing on the psychoanalytic interview as a psychosocial qualitative research method.

Kvale (1999) outlines seven aspects of the psychoanalytic research interview, of which I would argue three are applicable beyond clinical practice to a research context. Firstly, the open non-directive mode of interviewing based on the patient's free associations, their train of thoughts and communication and connections which gives access to unconscious material, together with the therapist's evenly-hovering attention without reaching for facts and knowing (Bion, 1962). This creates the potential space for meanings to emerge and be co-created in the analytic or research dyad. Secondly, the interpretation of meaning which is open to ambiguity, contradictions and re-interpretations. Thirdly, the emotional human interaction with reciprocal personal involvement is used to gain a deeper understanding of the subject. These aspects lead to rich and complex data which is relational, dialectical and constructive, something Kvale refers to as an 'inter-view' (Kvale, 1999).

One of the central concepts in a psychoanalytic understanding of human interactions is that of transference and countertransference. Transference was first described by Freud (Freud and Breuer, 1856) as something occurring in the relationship between the patient and the analyst. Simply understood it is the unconscious transfer of feelings, positive or negative, about someone from the patient's past, usually the mother or father, onto the analyst. The analyst in turn experiences countertransference – an unconscious reaction to the patient's transference. Countertransference can be experienced both emotionally, cognitively and physically (Jervis, 2009). Thus the analyst's countertransference becomes a useful tool to deepen their understanding of the patient's unconscious (Heimann, 1950).

Unconscious meanings also operate in everyday life and relationships and can be 'linked to complex webs of significance' (Hunt, 1989, p.26) such as later life experiences as well as those of childhood. More recent conceptualisations of transference and countertransference draw on complexity and chaos theories describing a complex and dynamic process where the patient and the analyst each brings personal, social and cultural history, including unconscious wishes, desires, conflicts and defences, to make sense of the interaction (Miller, 1999).

> *'Psychoanalytic treatment is a messy business. ....There are no discrete moments to be analyzed or events to be processed, but, rather, a continuous flow of experience that is always under construction. In the creation of this experience, the worlds of the patient and the analyst intersect, join together, and disjoin.' (Miller, 1999 p.377)*

In this way, past and present coalesce into a qualitative and holistic multiplicity (Crociani-Windland, 2009). One way in which this joining together can be understood is using the model of 'thirdness' as described by Benjamin (2004). Benjamin describes intersubjectivity as:

> *'a relationship of mutual recognition – a relation in which each person experiences the other as a 'like-subject', another mind who can be 'felt with', yet has a distinct, separate center of feeling and perception' (Benjamin, 2004, p.5)*

She likens it to Winnicott's concept of transitional space (Winnicott, 1971) and goes on to explain it as 'a quality or experience of intersubjective relatedness …. primarily as a principle, function, or relationship, rather than as a "thing"' (Benjamin, 2004, p.7). In other words, transference and countertransference are experienced in relationship, negotiated within a third space and based on intersubjectivity (Crociani-Windland, 2018).

In the psycho-social research interview then, the research data will include transference and countertransference elements as 'a co-constructed third element that does not belong to one or the other [researcher or researched]' (Crociani-Windland, 2018, p.44). Whether and how a subject tells their story to the researcher will depend on how the dyad relate to each other (Hollway and Jefferson, 2013).

An understanding of unconscious communication is achieved in psychoanalysis through the analyst's self-reflection, reflexivity and clinical supervision. Similarly,

within the psycho-social research encounter the reflexivity of the researcher is a necessary step in meaning making and introduces subjectivity as a key part of the data. How subjectivity is managed generally, and specifically in this project, to ensure research produces meaningful findings rather than a wild analysis will be addressed throughout this chapter. First, I will consider reflexivity.

4.2.2 Reflexivity

Reflexivity in qualitative research is widely recognised as highly important. The reason for this has gradually altered from a need to prove validity in order to compete with positivist research perceived as objective and, therefore, more reliable, to seeing reflexivity as valuable in its own right. It offers an opportunity to explore the co-constituted nature of research and the way in which the meanings of data are negotiated between researcher and participants (Finlay, 2003). The qualitative researcher needs to sustain a self-reflective stance throughout all stages of the research from inception, through field work and analysis, to publication. Psychosocial researchers in particular need to reflect on 'methods and practice, on our emotional involvement in the research and on the affective relationship between ourselves and the researched' (Clarke and Hoggett, 2009, p.3). For this reason, I kept a research journal throughout the project to capture my thoughts, ideas, feelings, dreams and reflections and this became important reflexive data.

Finlay offers a helpful typology of reflexivity and using her map (Finlay, 2003) I identified four variants which were particularly relevant in my research: introspection; intersubjective reflection, mutual collaboration and social critique. Introspection was used to link awareness of my own reasons for wanting to research the topic, my pre-understandings, prejudices and understandings, to my interpretations and knowledge claims. Intersubjective reflection was used to explore the research encounter itself, the emergent relationship between myself and the participant, and, in particular, for making sense of unconscious processes occurring. An awareness of my 'values, prejudices, identifications and object-relations' (Clarke and Hoggett, 2009, p.16) was needed in order to be able to know where feelings evoked in the research encounter originated. I utilised mutual collaboration by encouraging a reflexive dialogue with participants during the interviews and also employed reflexivity as social critique to consider power imbalances that may be at play.

As already highlighted, psycho-social research assumes both subject and researcher to be anxious and defended (Hollway and Jefferson, 2013), therefore, even with reflexivity it is not always possible for the researcher to access their own unconscious processes. Analysis of the data requires the involvement of others, such as colleagues, supervisors and peers in the form of research panels, to surface any unconscious material of the researcher which may be relevant. In psychosocial research this detailed reading of the data allows us to know 'how a researcher comes to produce such an account and opens it to the possibility of different readings of the same material' (Walkerdine, 1997, cited by Hollway and Jefferson, 2013, p.42). This process has also been called 'triple hermeneutics' (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2018) – interpretation of interpretations plus the interpretation of unconscious material. To achieve this, I involved other researchers in panels after each data set had been transcribed and analysed in order to gain differing perspectives on extracts of the data that I found particularly interesting, confusing or strongly indicative of a particular theme. My aim was to generate an analysis that was plausible and fair rather than claiming a truth.

This reflexive approach parallels relationally-orientated psychotherapy, a process I am very familiar with as a therapist.

4.2.3 Differences between psychoanalysis and psycho-social research

Some important distinctions exist however, between psychoanalytic clinical practice and psycho-social research. In a clinical setting the patient is there for his/her own purposes, to find relief from their psychological troubles and as such needs something from the analyst. However, the case is reversed in the research setting – the researcher needs to elicit information from the subject and hence the power relations are also reversed (Stamenova and Hinshelwood, 2018). I was aware in my interviews, for instance, how grateful and indebted I felt to the participants.

Thomas (2018) offers some important words of caution for psycho-social researchers borrowing from psychoanalysis which he asserts is a method in its own right. He makes the point that the kind of 'knowing' gained in both psychoanalysis and in psycho-social research, which can be thought of as relational, is contestable. However, in psychoanalysis, the knowledge is co-created, refined and verified over an extended period of time with the patient; it takes place at regular intervals, for example weekly over an extended period of time, often months or years, allowing a

deeper relationship to develop between clinician and patient. By contrast, in research the knowledge is usually gathered from one or two short interviews and the interpretations made without the subject being able to verify. This difference is an important one. In psychoanalysis, interpreting into the therapeutic encounter is how verification occurs; by therapist and patient working through and reflecting on both the successes and failures inherent in the therapy (Thomas, 2018).

Additionally, psychoanalysis is a private affair, whereas research is intended to be disseminated to a professional audience. In psychoanalysis, interpretations are shared with the patient offering an opportunity for mutual exploration and co-construction whereas in research the interpretation is traditionally withheld and forms part of the data analysis leading to a criticism that psycho-social research is exploitative. However, the withholding of interpretations from the research participant has also been argued to be ethically justified. If we accept that the defended subject is avoiding painful 'truths' about themselves then respecting their unconscious defences is an ethical position to take (Alexandrov, 2009).

In practice, I was able to share my thoughts with participants during the interviews whilst being mindful of interpretations which could cause undue distress. My interviews involved two meetings with all participants except two, and each interview ranged in length from 45 minutes to 1 hour 20 minutes, therefore longer in duration than other types of research interviews and more in line with a typical psychotherapy session. I found the opportunity to be more dialogic, offering the participants my own responses in the context of the interviews themselves, thereby creating space for co-construction of meanings and interpretations. I pick this point up further in section 4.7 during my critique of the method and again in Chapter 7, section 7.1 when reflecting on the use of online interviewing.

4.3 Sample

4.3.1 Rationale

In *The Three Ecologies*, Felix Guattari in relation to the environmental crisis says 'Only an ethico-political articulation – which I call ecosophy – between the three ecological registers (the environment, social relations and human subjectivity) would be likely to clarify these [environmental issues]' (Guattari, 2000, p.28). He argues that the three ecologies, social, mental and environmental, cannot be separated, they

are ‘inter-changeable lenses’ (Guattari, 2000, p.41) that interact and, therefore, we need to think transversally. Essentially, he argues that nature cannot be separated from culture.

Following Guattari, and since my interest derived from three strands of personal experience: clinical, personal and political, the overall study design sought to explore the relationship with the natural nonhuman world using these three overlapping registers which together sit within the backdrop of the CEE. Hence data from three different sources were gathered, namely therapists, clients and eco-activists, which map onto these arenas:

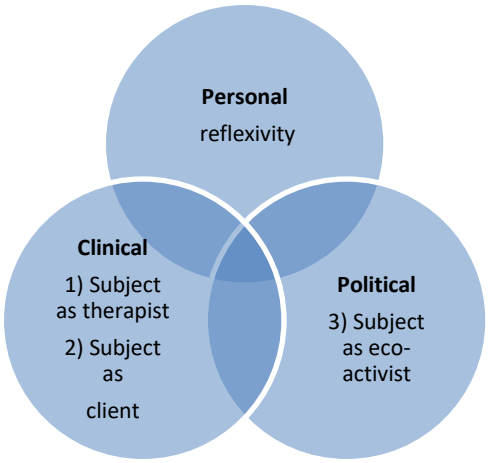


Figure 3 – Three overlapping registers of enquiry

The design illuminates the interaction and interdependency between individuals and society in relation to the natural world and the CEE. In addition it served as a triangulation of the data (Toma, 2006) such that data could be clarified, confirmed or contradicted, verified or corrected and unexpected findings incorporated.

4.3.2 Strand 1 – therapists

I employed a convenience and purposive sampling approach (Patton, 2002) as I wanted to generate information-rich data regarding client material related to the natural world and the CEE. I approached professional colleagues directly through email and through personal contact who had an interest in the natural world. They in turn posted my email out to their own professional networks. In this way, a convenience and friendship pyramid sampling process occurred (Braun and Clarke, 2013). The only inclusion criterion was that they had to have an active therapy practice. This was established at the first contact.

The final data set comprised seven participants, five female and two male therapists. One participant was in their 30's, three were in their 50's and three in their 60's. All were white British. Five lived and worked in Devon, one in Oxfordshire and one in a Midland's city. Their modalities included person-centred, integrative, dramatherapy and core process. Of the seven participants in this strand of the project, only two were complete strangers to me.

4.3.3 Strand 2 – clients

For this strand I initially employed a snowballing method (Hanley et al., 2015) by asking the therapists I had interviewed if they felt any of their clients would be interested and resilient enough to take part. From this, one participant, Sean, was recruited. I then asked colleagues in my own network to ask any of their clients who may be interested and whom they considered emotionally resilient enough to enter a research process around the topic of the natural world and the CEE.

Inclusion criteria were that they needed to be in or recently completed therapy and sufficiently emotionally resilient as judged by their therapist to take part.

From this a further six participants were recruited. A total of seven participants, four women and three men, comprised the data set. Two participants were in their 30's, two in their 40's, two in their 60's and one in their 70's. All were white British. Six lived in Devon and one in Kent.

4.3.4 Strand 3 – eco-activists

Using convenience and purposive sampling (Braun and Clarke, 2013) I advertised in a local newsletter for participants. Two people responded and took part in the research.

A research colleague then posted my advert amongst her social network and another two participants were recruited. Although I had also asked two therapist colleagues to post to their networks, no participants were recruited from this snowballing.

I then contacted a group of XR activists directly whom I had had personal contact with during the October 2019 protests, with no contact since. A further four participants were recruited from this.

Inclusion criteria was that they needed to identify as an eco-activist in some way and to have had experience of therapy. This was established at initial contact.

The final sample of eight participants consisted of three females and five males. One participant was in their 20's, one in their 30's, two in their 50's, two in their 60's and two in their 70's.

4.3.5 Limitations of sample

Using convenience sampling means that I have not captured a wide range of voices. All my participants were white middle class individuals, many living in rural Devon rather than cities. Although this can be seen as a limitation of the study, many of the participants were located around the town of Totnes which is known for its alternative culture and awareness concerning climate change and related environmental issues. For instance, it is the origin of the Transition Town movement, a movement engaged with climate change and the transition to a carbon-free society (Transition Network, 2021). This meant that in effect my sample was more purposive, with participants being able to provide information-rich data to analyse (Braun and Clarke, 2013).

It also reflects something about the topic. It seems this is the demographic most engaged with climate change issues and this has been a criticism of XR in particular (Fiennes, 2019; Gayle, 2019). It is also the demographic most likely to seek and be able to afford privately funded therapy. This runs counter to evidence which suggests that mental health impacts of the CEE are felt most by those in lower socio-economic groups (Ingle, 2020). Some therapists worked with clients from these groups, but typically reported that these clients were unconcerned with the CEE. They were instead seen as 'self-absorbed' and trying to deal with the psychological impacts of social factors of poverty, lack of opportunities, poor housing, abuse etcetera.

I had intended that each sample strand would be distinct and separate. However, in practice this was difficult to achieve. There was significant overlap between strands as shown in the Venn diagram below:

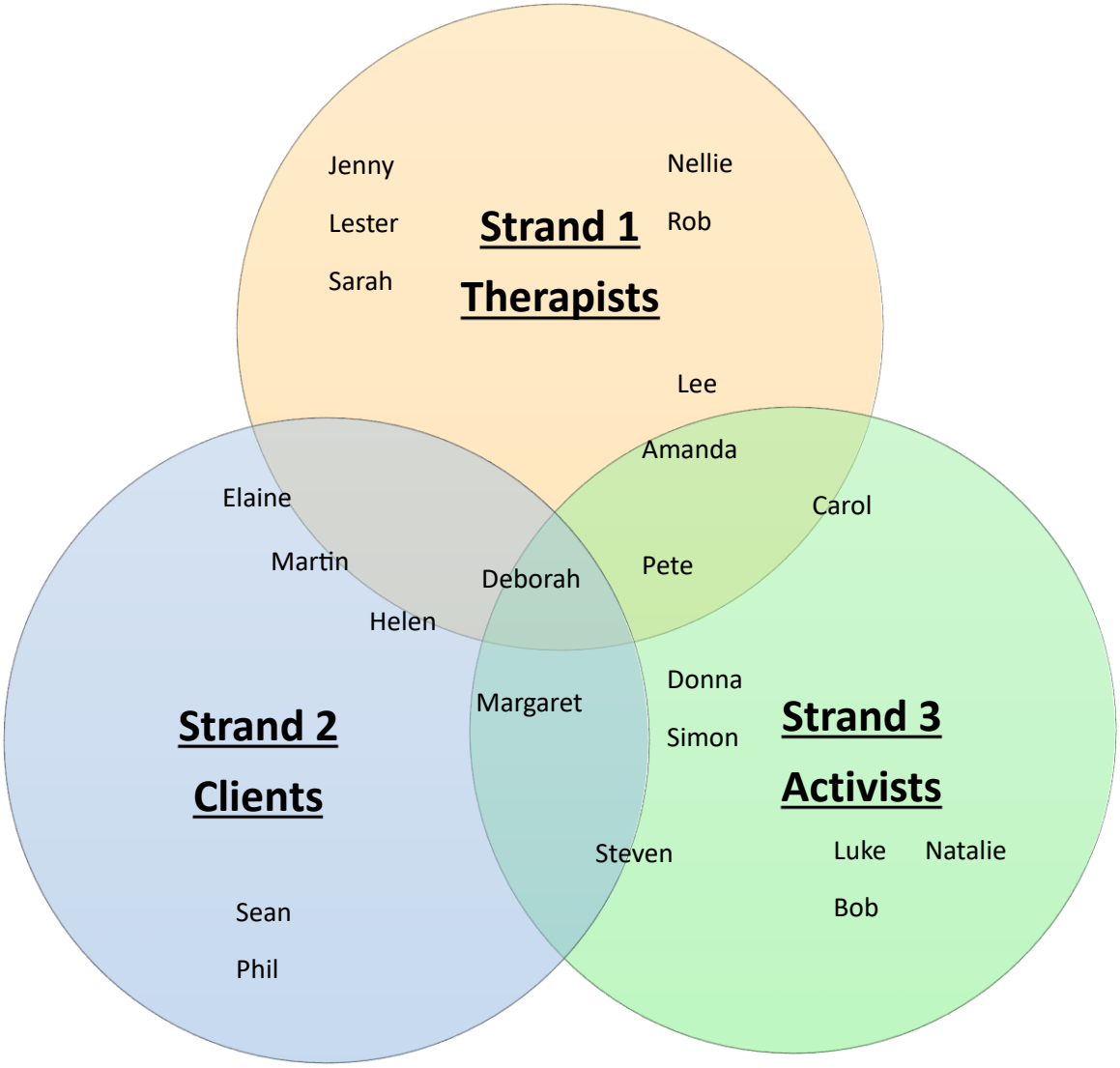


Figure 4 – Overlap of sample

In Strand 1, all therapists will have been clients at some time as this is a requirement of their training. Amanda was a member of Extinction Rebellion (XR) and Lee, although not having taken direct action, did consider herself be an activist to some extent in terms of signing petitions. In Strand 2, three of the clients (Elaine, Martin and Helen) were training to become therapists and although they were not qualified or practicing at the time of the interviews, their positioning in the diagram close to the area of overlap signifies a therapeutic mindset to some degree. Margaret was a member of XR and Deborah was a practicing therapist and a member of XR and so could be positioned in all three sections of the diagram. In Strand 3, Pete was a practicing therapist and Carol had been a counsellor in the past although no longer

practicing. Steven was involved in a therapeutically orientated group hence his positioning close to the overlap with strand 2.

Although this muddies the water a little in terms of sampling, it does reflect the real world where subjects occupy multiple positions. In order to maintain some sense of separation for the purposes of the research, however, I maintained a linear focus through using questions in each set of interviews that reflected the role of each participant in relation to the research questions. For instance, with strand 1, I explored with therapists what happened in the sessions with their clients – what was presented, how it was worked with and the impact on the therapist. In strand 2, I explored clients' biographies, their relationship with the natural world, their feelings about the CEE and what they spoke about in therapy. With strand 3 I explored participants' motivations for and experiences of engaging in action, their feelings regarding the CEE and their experiences of using therapy.

4.4 Ethics

The research was underpinned by British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy Ethical Guidelines for Research in the Counselling Professions (Mitchells, 2018) and UWE Code for Good Research Conduct (University of the West of England, 2015). In particular, the following principles were applied (Bond, 2015):

- Integrity – honesty and transparency at each stage of the project
- Rigour – ensuring compatibility between method and research questions
- Respect – for rights and dignity of participants
- Trustworthiness – build a trusting quality with participants
- Responsibility – consideration for how results are communicated and how they will they contribute to wellbeing of society?

An in-depth analysis, risk assessment and detailed planning was undertaken prior to seeking ethical approval. Full ethical approval was granted by UWE Ethics Committee on 17th June, 2020. Prior to interviewing participants were provided with a privacy notice, Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form (see appendices 1, 2a, 2b, 2c and 2d) to sign and return, ensuring fully informed consent was obtained. (Appendix 2d has been removed as it contains personal information). Participant's

identity was protected through use of pseudonyms and a Data Management Plan was adhered to.

Strand 1 (therapists) and Strand 2 (clients) interviews were conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic and as such ethical approval was granted with the condition that interviews were conducted online to ensure safety for participants and myself. Strand 3 (activist) interviews were conducted over the summer of 2021 when restrictions were being lifted. As a result most of these interviews were conducted in person, and outdoors where possible.

Particular ethical issues associated with this project were identified.

4.4.1 Sensitivity of the topic

Lee and Renzetti (1990) describe a sensitive topic as one that threatens in some way those involved in the research. This is particularly true where the research delves into deeply personal experience as this study aimed to do. The threat is then one of psychological and emotional consequences with the potential for causing difficult feelings among research participants. I was aware that participants may find themselves saying more than they intended, particularly as the study aimed to identify unconscious material. When involving eco-activists there may be issues for them as a potentially stigmatised group. They may have been involved in illegal activities which if disclosed during the research may cause subsequent fear of incrimination. The levels of confidentiality and anonymity were, therefore, carefully explained to all participants in the Participant Information Sheets and again at the beginning of each interview such that they understood that I would be required to disclose any criminal acts and concerns regarding harm to self and others.

A debriefing was conducted with participants following each interview where I asked ‘ How has it been for you talking about these topics with me today?’ My own skills and experience as a therapist enabled me to notice and effectively manage any distress as it occurred in the interviews, although this was in practice minimal. Additionally, I sent a follow-up ‘closing’ email to each participant after the final interview encouraging them to seek appropriate support if they were left troubled by the interviews and offering to signpost the participant to further sources of support or self-care if necessary. I also reminded them in the closing email that they could withdraw at any stage up to the analysis stage. This closure was an important part of

the research process. It mirrored the important function of an ending in a therapeutic process where emotional and psychological material can be closed and the relationship brought to a safe conclusion.

I was also aware of emotional risks for myself as researcher (Dickson-Swift et al., 2008). Qualitative research is emergent in nature and I realised that I may not be fully prepared for responses from participants and interactions may become emotionally intimate. It was likely that the research would touch on my own personal experience and/or I could be impacted by the participant's experience. I therefore, allowed sufficient time and space between interviews (usually several days) to allow myself to process any emotional impact. I took my own self-care seriously and ensured that I gave myself rest, spent time in natural environments and connected regularly with friends and family. This became particularly vital during the year of lockdown. In addition, external clinical supervision continued to take place monthly throughout the life of the study together with regular academic supervision.

4.4.2 Context: therapy

When interviewing clients in strand 2 it was important to ensure that the client was aware that although they may find it beneficial to talk about and reflect upon their experiences, the interview was not part of their therapy or a therapeutic intervention in itself. This was achieved primarily through providing clear information as part of the process of acquiring informed consent. It was also achieved I believe by referring to the participant's therapy at various points through the interview to clearly separate the interview with me from the sessions with their therapist.

I was aware that my own identity as a therapist could cause complexities when involving other therapist's clients as research participants, particularly when the therapist was a colleague. I needed to consider issues of power and dependency in the therapeutic relationship and my collegiate relationships, and the potential conflict of roles. If the participant became aware that I am also a therapist this could cause confusion for them and boundaries could become blurred. Therefore, self-disclosure was kept to a minimum and in the Participant Information Sheet I only referred to myself as a post-graduate researcher. I ensured that regular clinical supervision was planned to explore these issues although in practice the need did not arise.

Reflexivity also supported an ethical approach to the research (Flanagan, 2014). By continually questioning my own ideas, motives and responses to the research

through reflexive journaling, discussions with peers and in clinical and academic supervision, I remained alert to the risks associated with a dual role. I discuss this particular issue more fully in Chapter 9, section 9.1.3.

4.4.3 Methodology

As a qualitative psycho-social study exploring personal and sensitive topics, it was important for me to pay attention to the quality of the relationship with the participants (Bond, 2015). In particular, developing a quality of trust such that the participant felt able to safely talk openly and freely was important for both the quality of the data as well as the wellbeing of the participant. I achieved this by offering a warm, friendly and open manner. Rogers' core conditions (Rogers 1957) of empathy, congruence, unconditional positive regard, although particular to a therapeutic context, were also appropriate for my research interviews, albeit in a 'lighter' version to how I might present them when working as a therapist. By reacting in an empathic non-judgmental way to participants' stories and showing a genuineness I aimed to create a safe space for myself and the client to explore their experiences.

The study aimed to uncover unconscious as well as manifest material and as such posed some psychological risks to participants. They could through the process of telling their stories become aware of experiences hitherto forgotten or otherwise avoided and be disturbed by this. My own competency as a therapist was valuable to maintain sensitivity to verbal and non-verbal cues of distress and ensure appropriate pacing. However, from a psychoanalytic perspective distress does not necessarily equate to harm (Hollway and Jefferson, 2013). Hence, when a participant occasionally became tearful or emotional I left space to acknowledge the distress and made sure they were happy to continue.

However, this does raise the question of the meaning of consent since the unconscious cannot give consent. A participant consenting prior to the interviews would really only be consenting to their imagining of what it would be like, rather than the reality (Holmes, 2013). Although research participants were told in the participant information that the 'process may evoke memories or feelings that are difficult or distressing' the only stage at which they truly would be able to give fully informed consent would be after the interviews, another reason why I sent a follow-up email to all participants reminding them of their tight to withdraw.

In summary, measures to ensure good research conduct, practice and integrity included:

- Adherence to professional ethical and legal guidelines
- Regular clinical and academic supervision throughout the study
- Ongoing discussion with participants regarding consent and wellbeing
- Framework to ensure confidentiality and anonymity
- A clear plan for data management and data security in line with current legislation

4.5 Gathering the data

Psycho-social methodologies include a variety of qualitative and interpretive methods all concerned with constructing meanings from discursive data. In this research I used narrative interviewing based on Wendy Hollway and Tony Jefferson's Free Association Narrative Interview (FANI) (Hollway and Jefferson, 2013; 2000) and Tom Wengraf's Biographical Narrative Interview Method (BNIM) (Wengraf, 2001). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, a large proportion of interviews were conducted online and the impact of this is discussed later in this chapter.

4.5.1 Free Association Narrative Interview (FANI) and Biographical Narrative Interview Methods (BNIM)

FANI draws on narrative approaches where the subject is seen as a story-teller rather than a respondent to the interviewer's questions. The meaning of the story is created between the story-teller (subject) and the listener (interviewer). The story is not neutral but is constructed within the specific context in which it is being told and self-identity is seen as being constructed through such narratives (Hollway and Jefferson, 2013, 2000). Additionally, FANI follows the general principle of psycho-social research in that it rests on the assumption that a person's inner world (psyche) cannot be understood without a parallel understanding of their outer worlds (social) and that their experiences of the outer world similarly cannot be understood without an understanding of how their inner worlds mediate and construct that experience. It is designed to explore the meanings of findings and answer the 'why' questions, which Hollway and Jefferson argue traditional discursive methods fail to do (Hollway and Jefferson, 2005); questions such as why is a subject invested in a particular identity? Why did they choose to act in a particular way? Why might they tell their 'story' in a particular way? Hollway and Jefferson highlight the 'transparent

self problem' i.e. the assumption that subjects 'tell it like it is' and know who they are and are willing it to tell it to a stranger. (Hollway and Jefferson, 2013, p.3). According to Hollway and Jefferson (2000, 2013), and drawing on a psychoanalytic concept of the self, people have a confusing and contradictory relationship to knowing about themselves which can be seen in everyday interactions and psychosocial research needs to account for this.

One of the key principles of eliciting narrative is to ensure that the Gestalt or meaning-frame of a person's story emerges intact (Rosenthal, 1990, cited by Hollway and Jefferson 2013). In order to do this, certain principles are followed. Firstly, the use of very open questions allows the person to enter into their own meaning-frame rather than be structured by that of the interviewer. Secondly, the questions need to elicit stories as these are linked to the subject's real and specific experiences.

> *'The particular story told, the manner and detail of its telling, the points emphasised, the morals drawn, all represent choices made by the story-teller. Such choices are revealing, often more so than the teller suspects. This … is what it shares with the psychoanalytic method of free associations.'* (*Hollway and Jefferson, 2013, pp.32-33)*

Hollway and Jefferson stress the central important of free association in their method. They argue that allowing the subject to tell the story in their own way, with all the contradictions, avoidances and elisions, gives access to their anxieties and concerns. In other words, they give access to their unconscious conflicts and the defences they use to avoid them.

The third principle is to avoid asking direct 'why' questions as these often elicit an intellectual response which draws on dominant and well-worn discourses rather than hidden unconscious and defensive meanings. The final principle is that of following the subject's ordering and phrasing of the narrative rather than imposing a structure. In this way the interviewer is transformed from a 'highly visible asker of … questions to the almost invisible, facilitating catalyst to their stories' (Hollway and Jefferson, 2013, p.34) and the subject's meaning-frames are preserved.

FANI method consists of two interviews. The first is designed to elicit free association narrative themes associated with the particular research questions, gain a reading of the emotional tone and pick up any contradictions and inconsistencies.

The second interview is designed to seek further evidence of any hypotheses being developed, to explore themes which may have been absent from the first interview and to give the subjects an opportunity to reflect (Hollway and Jefferson, 2013).

The BNIM method is very similar to FANI but has a particular focus on the subject's biography, their life story or part of their life story (Wengraf, 2001). As such the structure of questions is designed to elicit memories of particular incidents that evoke a reliving of Particular Incident Narratives (PINs) (Wengraf, 2018) and subsequent affect. The interview begins with a Single Question Designed to Induce a Narrative, a SQUIN (Wengraf, 2018, 2001). Following the asking of the SQUIN the researcher is required to remain silent until the subject has completed their narrative. The structure of the SQUIN is prescribed as follows:

> *'Can you please tell me the story of [your life in respect of XXXX], all the experiences and events that have been important for you personally. I'll listen first, I won't interrupt, I'll just take some notes in case I have any questions for when you have finished telling me about it all. ..... Start wherever you like and take the time you need' (Wengraf, 2018, p.216)*

The next phase involves the interviewer selecting those phrases used by the subject in the first phase that seem most promising in regards to the research questions, to elicit further narrative. The aim is to elicit narrative that is more than just a detached remembering but rather a scenic drama or enactment, to 'make present rather than just remember…accessing the qualitative aspect of time' (Crociani-Windland, 2018, p.31). Follow up questions in this phase typically are structured as follows:

> *'You said 'XXX' can you remember a particular example when this was the case ...how it all happened?' (Wengraf, 2018, p.218)*

My interviews with therapists (strand 1) followed a structure based on FANI. An initial series of questions were designed based on my research questions and I conducted pilot interviews with two therapists ('Jenny' and 'Lester'), both of whom were known to me. Questions were designed to elicit narratives, or stories, from participants regarding their experiences of working with clients' relationship with the natural world. It is important to note that structuring and designing the question is not a neutral process that just concerns generating data:

> *'the research question is not an innocent, neutral tool but an intervention that already carries a payload of meaning that will*

> *shape the knowledge produced from the research' (Spears et al., 2005, p.546)*

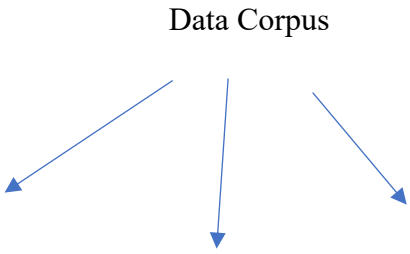
Following these initial pilot interviews, certain modifications developed and the final schedule for the first interview can be found in Appendix 3a. In order to establish more of a Gestalt, an additional question was added to subsequent interviews regarding the therapist's biography 'Can you tell me about how you came to be a therapist?' I felt I needed to understand the participant's motivation and journey to become a therapist in order to get a sense of how they might approach their practice. In order to explore the therapist's attitudes towards the current social context I added a theme-centred question (Schorn 2000) – 'What does it mean to you to be a therapist at this point in history?' I became aware subsequently that although I consciously added this question in order to explore how relevant the CEE was to them and whether they saw a role for therapy in addressing the issues associated with it, I came to see that this continues to be a personal question too; I am asking this of myself and seeking answers through my research.

Following transcription and initial consideration of the first interview data a second series of tailored questions were designed for each individual participant to be used in the second interview. I used this as an opportunity to share my responses and interpretations from the first interview, thereby checking the resonance of my ongoing meaning making with each participant and allowing for further co-creation of meaning and understandings.

My interviews with clients (strand 2) and activists (strand 3) were based more on a BNIM structure beginning with a SQUIN and following up key phrases in first and second interviews. I felt that having a sense of participants' biography was important in understanding their relationship to the natural world and, for strand 3, their decision to enter into environmental activism. Interview schedules for strand 2 and 3 can be found in appendices 3b and 3c respectively.

4.6 Analysis

The complete corpus of data is depicted below:



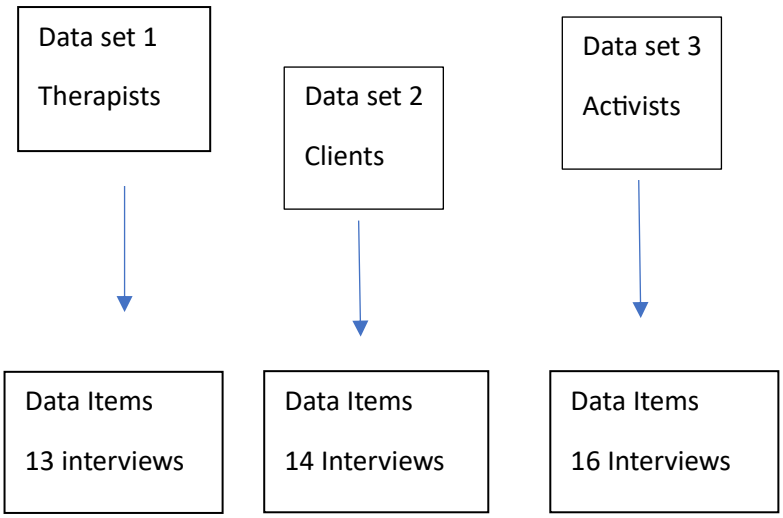


Figure 5 – Corpus of data

The data was examined at the level of individual data items, individual data sets and as a complete corpus.

At the data item level, brief pen portraits (Sheard and March, 2019) were written about each participant to give background and context. Factual information was extracted from the interview data such as age, occupation and life background. The pen portraits also included individual participant characteristics and my general observations and impressions of the participants from my field notes. I also searched for a core narrative at this stage, a story line or plot line associated to my research questions (Cartwright, 2004) together with a sense of the emotional tone of the participants' narrative. This process served to capture some counter-transferential data which was then taken account of in my analysis.

Thematic analysis (TA) (Braun and Clarke, 2006) was then conducted for each individual data set in an abductive process (Peirce, 1992) which involved working with the data, generating codes, themes and patterns then using theory to help make sense of this. Specifically, reflexive TA (Braun and Clarke, 2021, 2019) was used which puts 'the researcher's role in knowledge production [..] at the heart of [the] approach' (Braun and Clarke, 2019, p.594) and this is consistent with a psycho-social methodology and FANI and BNIM in particular where the researcher is understood to be co-constructing the narrative.

The data were generated and analysed in the following sequence:

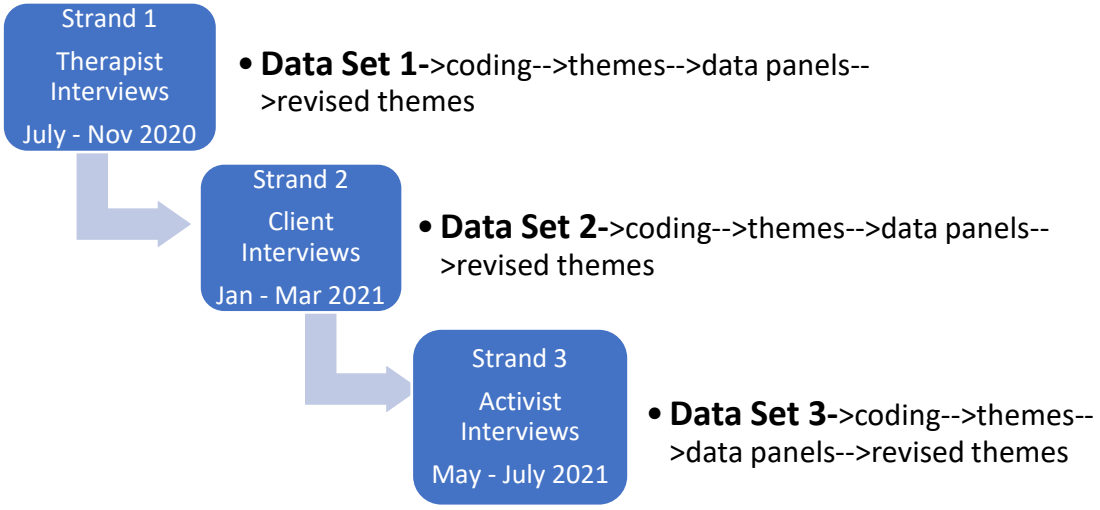


Figure 6 – Generation and analysis of data

Braun and Clarke's (2006) step-by-step process was followed for each data set.

4.6.1 Familiarising myself with the data

Interviews were transcribed using Otter AI software then subsequently manually edited for corrections and punctuation to ensure accurate meaning was retained. This editing process was conducted within two to three days of the interviews and involved listening to the recordings repeatedly and was an important part of familiarising myself with the data. As I listened and edited I also made notes of what was striking me about the narrative and my own responses to the narrative, both in the here-and-now as I was familiarising myself but also remembering the there-and-then of the actual interview.

I included repetitions of words and unfinished words in the verbatim transcript as well as non-verbal utterances (laughter, coughs, ums, ahs etcetera) and pauses. This helped to give a sense of the way something was said as well as what was said.

During this phase I began to take note of items of interest, patterns within the data set as well as differences between participants. I was interested in how participants made sense of their experiences and why particular narratives might be used.

As I progressed from data set 1 to 2 to 3 I also noted any patterns across the data sets, thereby examining the whole data corpus. I looked for how each data set related to the others, where there were correspondences and where there were contradictions. What I noticed is likely affected by own biases and interests and my own personal experiences will shape how I read the data (Braun and Clarke, 2013). Reflexivity and the use of data panels were used to mitigate against this as described below in section 4.6.4 I include more discussion of this in my findings chapter.

4.6.2 Generating initial codes

Once a complete data set had been transcribed and edited I began initial coding over the whole data set.

For data set 1, I used complete coding (Braun and Clarke, 2013) as I wanted to identify anything and everything which could be relevant to my research question. As I progressed through to data set 2 and 3 the coding became increasingly selective, focussing on what was happening in the therapeutic space and what happened to participants' affect associated with the CEE.

Codes were both data-derived (semantic) and researcher-derived (latent) (Braun and Clarke, 2013). Semantic codes reflected the content of the interviews, what participants actually said. Latent codes on the other hand were based on my interpretation of participants' narrative and the implicit meanings that underpinned what was said.

Codes for each individual interview were labelled on the transcript by highlighting the text on the Microsoft Word document then summarised and described in separate tables. My aim was to follow Braun and Clarke's guidance that codes should capture what is in the data and should work when separated from the data (Braun and Clarke, 2013).

4.6.3 Searching for themes

Braun and Clarke (2013) state that TA rests on the assumption that patterns or themes identified in the data 'capture something psychologically or socially meaningful' (Braun and Clarke, 2013, p.223). They also state that a theme captures 'something important in relation to the overall research question' and has a 'central organising concept' (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.82). In developing the themes I used

the codes as building blocks, clustering codes around central organising concepts that gave meaning to the data set in relation to my research questions.

It is important at this point to note Braun and Clarke's key warning that patterns do not wait to be discovered in the data by the researcher. Rather, it is an active process whereby the researcher makes choices about how they 'shape and craft their raw data' (Braun and Clarke, 2013 p.225). The way in which I created the themes, therefore, reflects my own interests, biases and experiences. My interpretation of what was said is, therefore, subjective. However, as discussed in earlier sections, to minimise the possibility of completely wild analysis I often shared my interpretations with participants during the interviews, using the second interview in particular as an opportunity to check my interpretations following an initial TA of the first interview data.

Sub-themes were developed when there appeared to be sub-sets of data each with a different and subtle aspect but still coalescing around the central organising concept of the over-arching theme.

I also used visual maps to help me understand the relationship between the themes and sub-themes and to tell a particular story about the data (Braun and Clarke, 2013 p.230).

4.6.4 Reviewing and refining themes

The candidate themes were reviewed by revisiting the interview transcripts to check that they still made sense. In addition, data panels were held with psychosocial and clinical colleagues to check for different perspectives on the data. I selected extracts from the interview transcripts that I found confusing, unclear or where I wanted to check out my interpretations.

Although the TA resulted in a rich reading of the data, I felt a more focussed reflexive and psycho-social lens was also needed. I, therefore, relistened to all the recordings with a set of questions designed as prompts to deepen my analysis still further. This proved very productive, although time consuming. The questions I posed myself are listed in Appendix 4.

During the writing and recording of my findings, the definitions and names of my themes evolved. This was an important part of the analysis as it facilitated the

development of my findings about the data. Therefore, developing themes, writing up the findings and the analysis occurred in an iterative backwards and forwards manner. Sometimes, earlier steps of reading transcripts and generating codes were re-visited as themes were further refined.

Tables summarising final themes, sub-themes and codes for each data set are in appendices 5a, 5b and 5c and the outcome of my complete analysis will be discussed in Chapters 5 and 6.

4.7 Critique of the method

Much of the critique of the methods used in this research project is directed towards FANI, possibly as it has been much more widely used and cited. However, as the two methods are so similar the critique can justifiably be applied to BNIM.

There has been vigorous debate amongst social psychology researchers regarding the validity of FANI and its claims to knowledge of the psycho-social processes involved in the various subjects researched. In terms of manifest content, how true is the story, how does the story relate to events that happened? However, in FANI and BNIM the narrative is not treated as a factual report but as a means to understand the subject telling the story. The debate has also concerned ontology and epistemology. Does an internal world consisting of unconscious conflicts exist or not, and does this world pre-exist the social one? If so, can we access knowledge regarding this unconscious inner world? Conversely, does subjectivity only develop through social relations, structures and discourse?

One of the key issues contested is the use of psychoanalytic theory in the analysis of the data (Parker, 2005; Spears, 2005; Wetherell, 2005). The interpretation of narrative as indicative of unconscious processes has been robustly challenged. Wetherell (2005) challenges the analysis as claiming to produce the 'one true story' and to reveal the subject's 'real character' (Wetherell, 2005, p.171). Commenting on one particular case analysis conducted by Hollway and Jefferson (2005) she argues that conflicts are not hidden or deep but are in fact clearly present in the interview narrative and are indicative of conflicting identities, subject positions within available discourses and limited interpretive repertoires. However, such a discursive reading does not explain **why** the subject takes a particular position within a

discourse (Frosh et al., 2003) and this is something that FANI and BNIM seek to understand.

Similarly, Spears (2005) commenting on the same paper by Hollway and Jefferson suggests that the subject's reluctance to reveal elements of his story may not be a sign of unconscious conflicts and defences at all but rather a dialogue 'between personal private knowledge and public confession to an audience' (Spears, 2005, p.167). However, Hollway and Jefferson argue that when inner conflicts become unbearable then the use of discursive resources (thought, discourse and so on) are not available to individuals. This results in a 'puzzle' in the narrative that can only be made sense of in terms of unconscious dynamics (Hollway and Jefferson, 2005)

Hollway and Jefferson have been accused of individualizing, psychologizing and pathologizing the subject (Parker, 2005; Wetherell, 2005), thereby moving further away from a psychosocial reading. This is another criticism that they, and I, rebuke. Their body of work clearly takes into account issues such as power, class, dominant discourses and social structures. In fact, Hollway (2006) turns the argument around and accuses the post-structuralists of not taking sufficient account of

> *'psychological processes whereby the recursive formation of selves within their life settings is not only mediated by complex material, discursive and relational influences but also by dynamic, intersubjective, unconscious processes' (Hollway, 2006 p.466)*

In other words, individual biography affects *how* social structures mediate individual identities and why particular discursive positions are invested in. In addition, some of these processes will not be conscious or visible in the discourse. Frosh et al. (2003) similarly argue for a both/and position. They suggest that 'a rigorous awareness of the constructive activity of social processes and an equally potent analysis of the agentic struggles of individual subjects' is needed (Frosh et al., 2003, p.41).

Another criticism of FANI and BNIM is an ethical one and relates to a disempowering of the subject (Parker, 2005) and an imbalance in interpretive authority between researcher and subject with the researcher being positioned as an expert knowing more about the subject than they do themselves (Archard, 2020). Hollway and Jefferson (2013) make the point that although feminist critique claims that by interpreting and modifying subjects' accounts we exercise an undemocratic

power differential, by applying the same level of interpretation to the researcher we can diminish such inequalities.

This then raises the question regarding whether to share the interpretations and analysis with the subjects. It may create distress or disturbance, particularly if the theme is a sensitive one. Alternatively, any rejection of the analysis on the part of the subject may be interpreted by the researcher as simply more evidence of a defended subject creating the belief that the researcher is always right.

As an experienced psychotherapist, I believe I have been able to use my skills to mitigate these criticisms. For instance, working with transference and countertransference, using reflexive analysis and offering interpretations in a relational dynamic are practices that I use every day in my practice. I employed a more dialogic style (Hoggett et al., 2010) in the use of FANI and BNIM allowing some of my own thoughts and responses to the subject's narrative to become part of the interview, particularly during the second interview. By interpreting into the interviews in this way, a kind of 'thinking aloud' (Hoggett et al., 2010, p.176) I moved away from rigidly separating the stages of data collection from data analysis. This was a way to test the validity of my interpretations and to address the power imbalance in the researcher-participant dynamic. Kvale (2002) says,

> *'Truth is constituted through a dialogue; valid knowledge claims emerge as conflicting interpretations and action possibilities are discussed and negotiated among the members of a community.' (Kvale, 2002, p.306)*

I discuss below how this approach was a product of having to interview online due to lockdown rules imposed during the pandemic and it can be viewed as taking a reflexive-relational approach (Finlay, 2011) where 'data is seen as emerging out of the researcher and [participant] relationship and as being co-created [….] in the embodied dialogical encounter' (Finlay, 2011, p.160) and is compatible with a relational psychotherapeutic approach. The validity of my analysis was strengthened through this consensual process and diminished my power as researcher to impose interpretations post interview. Although such interpreting into the interview requires caution (Archard, 2020; Frosh and Emerson, 2005) as an experienced psychotherapist I felt comfortable sharing my thoughts and responses at certain points with participants in the interview, particularly in second interviews where a

certain level of rapport and trust had been established and also with respondents whom I had previously met in other contexts. This more involved style of interviewing has similarities with a post-qualitative approach (Le Grange, 2018) that encourages researchers to respond creatively to their own vitality as a human being, 'an invitation to dance' (Le Grange, 2018, p.9). When working in this way, I felt less impeded as an extract from my research journal indicates, 'I feel less like I had one hand tied behind my back'.

4.7.1 Online interviewing

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic thirty-one out of forty-two interviews were conducted online using Zoom live video. It is, therefore, necessary to reflect on the impact of this on the interview process and the data.

Russell (2018) discusses the way in which using online conferencing platforms for therapy differs from co-present therapy. She argues that technologically mediated therapy is not equivalent to co-present therapy; you cannot just simply substitute one for the other and there are some significant losses. I would argue, that by the same token, online psychosocial interviewing is not equivalent to co-present interviewing. However, rich data was still produced. Four aspects of online interviewing were particularly notable and these affected the level of intimacy in the research encounter in different ways.

Firstly, the physical environment. I was not able to control the participant's environment in the same way as if we had met in person in my consulting room, as originally planned. Instead, I was reliant on the participant to take responsibility for these things. I could not make the environment safe in terms of confidentiality, interruptions and distractions or create the 'holding' environment that enables the participant to feel secure and able to be spontaneous. Hollway (2020) argues it is important to make the 'care taking' in a virtual psycho-social research environment visible. I tried to do this by asking the participant at the beginning whether they were comfortable, needed anything such as a drink and whether they felt ready to begin. There were occasions where the interview was interrupted by a phone ringing, a dog barking or the sound of someone else in the house. Sometimes this intrusion distracted from the intimacy, but at other times it acted as a window into the participants domestic life and served to increase the intimacy. The tender way in

which a participant cradled their dog for instance gave a valuable insight into their relationship with it.

The use of technology as a platform for the interview also had an impact. The unreliability of the technology could be a distraction with poor internet connection, delayed transmission, pixelated images and distorted audio. On more than one occasion, an interview unexpectedly halted due to a dropped connection, with frozen images and one of us speaking into empty space. Frustratingly this might happen at a moment of affect, or when some key material was being shared. We would then have to re-establish where we were in the narrative, points or questions repeated and often I would feel that both potency and intimacy was lost. Similarly, delayed audio transmission often occurred leading to talking over each other or interrupting. This gave the interview less of a spacious feel and potentially detracted from the intimacy. When the technology failed, I would feel a sense of shame, especially early on in the research, as though it were my fault; I had not been a good enough researcher, akin to Winnicott's notion of being a good enough mother (Winnicott, 1964). However, there were also times when the shared frustration or humour created a moment of connection and intimacy between us, a recognition of our shared struggle with our intimate entanglement with Information Technology (Latimer and Gomez, 2019).

Additionally, maintaining a technological focus created some self-consciousness around the use of the tools which, had we been in the same room would not have existed, although this lessened the more interviews I conducted. In the early days of getting used to the technology, the focus on the mechanics rendered the intimacy of the encounter less visible. In their monograph 'Intimate Entanglements' Latimer and Gomez (2019) make the point that technology can make human intimacy invisible in science and technology research. Although my research project is within the psychosocial field, my reliance on technology seemed to sometimes create a similar effect. Myself and the participant were each interacting with our respective computers, screens, cameras, microphones and keyboards and this became figural whilst the intimacy of the interview encounter was occurring in the background. We were both ironically concerned with the quality of the technological 'connection' and less with the human connection.

Related to this, the need to keep a very focussed attention on the screen and to the words being spoken was not conducive to a free-floating, free associative environment that is the basis of FANI and BNIM. It compounded the already present restriction to my reverie caused by my anxious desire to obtain rich research data. Online, it was sometimes even harder to allow my own thoughts, images and associations to flow and for my mind to move internally and externally. Perhaps the creation of a third, transitional space, a co-created meaning-frame was restricted because of this.

I also found that the quality of my gaze was different online, it somehow felt more concentrated, more penetrative and even at times objectifying of the other. Deepti Sachdev's has spoken about the 'touch of the gaze' (Sachdev, 2021) and it made me think of the difference between a soft gaze as an empathic or supportive touch and a direct focussed looking, a hyper-focussing (Padfield, 2021) that could have a more challenging quality.

The lack of embodied presence was another factor impacting the intimacy of the encounter. I was more reliant on explicit verbal communication since the more subtle perceptions of somatosensory experiencing such as energy shifts, changes in skin tone, breath, pulse and so on are not easily noticed online, especially if the quality of the screen image is poor. One participant, made a point of telling me she was crying as she realised that I couldn't see the tears in her eyes on the screen. She wanted me to know and had to do extra 'work' to create the intimate experience of being seen.

Neuroscience shows that 'the body is the main stage for emotions, either directly or via representation in the somatosensory structures of the brain' (Damasio, 2000, p.287) something called embodied cognition. Much of this embodied cognition is unconscious and implicit and relates to what Russell calls 'intuition, empathy and emotional communication between individuals' (Russell, 2018 p.82) something which I would call intimacy and see as important in psychosocial interviewing.

At times I found myself seeking a more embodied connection. For instance, I would try to imagine the location of the participant's home, what else was in the room with them, the view from the window, the background smells and sounds. I realised what I was trying to do was put my sensory body in the room in my imagination, trying to fill the gaps created by the virtual interview process.

The lack of embodied presence not only created a sense of distance from the subject of the person but also the subject of the topic. Given the distressing material I was exploring, it may have been quite protective, facilitating a form of functional denial (Moser, 2019). In other words I could know about the CEE and listen to the participants talk about it, but could still get the job of interviewing done. I instead often seemed to feel my emotions later, whilst listening to the recording, or at a later date, triggered by something I subsequently read or heard regarding climate change or environmental destruction and finding myself in tears or feeling anxious and fearful. I discuss the impact of the research process on myself in Chapter 9.

I have already discussed the use of a more dialogic style of interviewing (section 4.7) as a way of addressing some of the criticisms of psycho-social methods and this is also relevant to the discussion here regarding the impact of online interviewing. I think this more dialogic style was yet another way in which I was attempting to increase the intimacy and reflects my inclination as a therapist to draw the other into a dialogic relationship. I found I was much more responsive in the interviews than perhaps Hollway and Jefferson or Wengraf might advocate; 'the researcher's responsibility is to be a good listener' (Holway and Jefferson, 2013, p.29). When listening to the recordings I was struck by the frequency of my utterings throughout the participants' narrative – uh huh, mmm, yeah etc. I was trying to let the participant know I'm here, I'm listening, I'm with you. I would regularly reflect back what the participant had told me, often offering my own response to what they had said. I would use phrases like, 'It sounds as though ….' Or 'I'm wondering if …'. Often this encouraged the participant to go a little further into their experience, leading to further associations, stimulating new shared insights and deepening the intimacy. This confirmed Hoggett et al.'s view (2010) that this is a way of assessing the value of an interpretation.

The important moments of saying 'hello' and 'goodbye' were also different online. When our faces suddenly appeared 18 inches in front of us, myself and my participants were thrown into a moment of intimacy without a gradual approaching. There was no initial viewing each other from a distance, a sensing of the other's surroundings, the gradual coming together and perhaps a handshake to signify friendliness. At the other end of the interview, after having shared perhaps personal and intimate material, the goodbye process was abrupt, in essence a click, click, gone

experience. What was left was a silence and a blank screen. It could feel like an abandonment. And it was unclear who should click first. The corollary to this is of course that the participant had the power to click off at any point should they have wished to end the interview.

Additionally, with no journey to and from the interview for either myself or the participant, it reduces the time available for anticipation, reflection and digestion, all processes which involve a bodily experience. This may have been particularly relevant for the participants in the time between first and second interviews. The framing of the interview, therefore, became important and my attempts to build the intimacy gradually prior to the first interview included making emails as friendly and warm in tone as possible, using emoji's appropriately, especially the smiley face one. I also felt I wanted to honour the time we had spent together online and so always followed up the interview a few days later with a thank you email, expressing my gratitude and letting them know that I had been moved by their stories. In this way I was saying – you have had an impact on me, an admission of intimate relating.

Summary

This chapter has outlined the rationale for a taking a psycho-social approach to the project which explores the interrelationship between individual subjectivities and social and cultural factors associated with the ecological self and the CEE. The use of FANI and BNIM allowed for the inferring of unconscious as well as manifest content of participant narratives, paying particular attention to the relationship between myself and the participant as it unfolded in the interviews. Using a more dialogic style of interviewing, in part stimulated by interviewing online, allowed me to interpret into the interviews thereby strengthening validity and diminishing the power differential between myself and the participant. Additionally, having to take measures to mitigate the limitations of interviewing online was a valuable development of the methods. Analysis was complex and time consuming but ultimately productive. The findings will be discussed in the following two chapters.

Chapter 5 – Findings Part 1: The Clinical Lens – Findings from Client and Therapist Interviews

Introduction

In this chapter I describe my findings from interviews with therapists and clients – strand 1 and strand 2. Rather than separating the findings of these strands I report and discuss them together. The order in which I collected the data was to interview therapists first followed by clients. As I began to analyse the data from clients I observed that the themes between the two strands were closely aligned. I, therefore, present the findings as a combination. Taken together the two sets of data give an insight into the dynamics surrounding the CEE in the therapeutic context, the world of therapist and client. In examining the data I have used the interchangeable lenses of the personal (by paying attention to the individual of therapist and client), the clinical (by considering the inter-personal relationship between therapist and client) and the political (by drawing on social and cultural factors influencing the therapeutic encounter). Throughout analysis of the data my reflexivity has added a further source of illumination. In so doing I am recognising the co-constructed nature of meaning between myself and the participants; the way in which the interviews become a correspondence (Ingold, 2015 cited in Le Grange, 2018) where my own responses, questions and interpretations are an answer to what I feel is happening in the dialogue.

To recap, my overarching research questions were:

1. How are feelings regarding the CEE experienced in therapy and activism? Where are the similarities, differences and gaps?
2. What unconscious defences are employed in therapy and activism to manage difficult feelings? In what way are they helpful or unhelpful?
3. What do we understand about the task of therapy and activism in these times?
4. Are the current models, contexts and tools of therapy relevant for supporting individuals to deal with the emotional impact of the CEE? What else is helpful?

To remind the reader I provide a summary of the sample. The therapist group consisted of seven participants, five female and two male, ranging in age from

thirties to sixties. Their trained modalities covered person-centred, integrative, dramatherapy and core process (Buddhist based). The pseudonyms assigned were:

Jenny

Lester

Nellie

Lee

Amanda

Sarah

Rob

The client group consisted of seven participants, four female and three male, ranging in age from thirties to seventies. Their time in therapy ranged from a few weeks to on and off over several years. The pseudonyms assigned were:

Sean

Margaret

Deborah

Phil

Elaine

Martin

Helen

I will now discuss the themes and sub-themes that I drew from the data.

5.1 Finding 1 – Clients and therapists talk about nature in a particular way

Talk about nature and the natural world was very common between therapists and clients. It was generally talked about in positive terms and three sub-themes were apparent in the narratives: nature as medicine; nature as attachment figure and nature as spiritual practice.

5.1.1 Nature as medicine

Therapists and clients were very comfortable discussing the natural world as something beneficial for mental health and wellbeing, as a resource to alleviate anxiety, depression and stress. This sub-theme was present in many of the interviews with both clients and therapists. Therapists encourage their clients to spend time in

nature, to connect with nature as a way of relaxing, calming the mind and finding joy in the natural world. Spending time in nature is seen as an important aspect of helping clients to support themselves and develop self-care strategies to lift mood. For instance Lee said, '*I also often suggest that people strengthen their connection with nature as part of their sort of therapy work'*. The physical benefits of being active in nature, such as walking and swimming, were also mentioned by both therapists and clients, as was the sensory experience linked to mindfulness practices.

The tone of this sub-theme is one of nature providing nourishment and the power of nature to heal – *'that connection with nature is literally a healing modality'* (Lee). This could reflect therapists' anxieties about their own lack of efficacy or resources to help clients at times. For instance, Rob who works in a hospital setting as well as having an outdoor private practice said:

> *'I've got support when I'm in the woods, there's so much more opportunity for something else to come into the process that isn't just what I'm bringing to my client. So it feels like a very, very supportive space in which to work, feels much less demanding on me, on my own resource on what I can think up or respond with, um how empathic can I be? How attuned can I be? You know, if I'm working in a cold clinical room in the hospital, with bare walls (laughs), it's very, very demanding, you know, this is, it's all about what I can bring really. It often feels, or there's a sense of pressure around what I can bring to facilitate this process. When I'm in the woods I feel like I can breathe out and I can lean into something that is going to take up some of the pressure.'*

Therapists also see the natural world as an important resource for their own well-being and self-care. They spoke of the way in which spending time in nature was a way of recharging and as a contrast to the emotional burden of their work.

This talk of 'nature as medicine' corresponds to a popular narrative regarding the natural world and one which was intensified during the pandemic when, during lockdown many people took walks in nature as a means of exercising and getting out of the confines of the home. Both professional and public media regularly reported the benefits of spending time in nature. It is, however, a positive and often idealised view of nature; participants use words such as '*perfection'* and '*purity'* and '*nature provides everything you need*'. I will return to this point in section 5.4.2.1.

5.1.2 Nature as attachment figure

The relationship with nature was also often talked about in language that evokes an attachment paradigm. Therapists and clients talked about the way in which the natural world can nurture, hold and contain difficult feelings, or a give a sense of acceptance and belonging in the natural world. Clients in particular spoke about special relationships or having an affinity with elements in the natural world such as trees or rivers, and of deep sadness at the loss of dearly loved animals. These close affectionate bonds with animals and natural elements are talked about between therapists and clients.

I was particularly struck by the way Rob spoke about the woodland where he works with private clients. He spoke about the clients ending a relationship with a '*significant other'* when the therapeutic work in the woods came to an end, the woods represented a '*loving…good parent that was holding and providing*'. Rob described some clients who found it difficult to have close relationships with people, who '*could not be held in the arms of another human but could be held by a tree'*.

Rob also noted that in his own life he feels in relationship with the land and landscape. He talked about feeling as though he was '*not showing up'* enough in the relationship and that his avoidant attachment style can be seen in the way he relates to the land too. As he spoke about this I had the feeling that perhaps he had just ended a romantic relationship and that we were talking about two things at the same time. Although not referred to directly we seemed to move back and forth between his relationship with the human and more-than-human and that these two registers, the personal and the ecological were in fact closely connected.

Clients all described what the natural world had provided for them in their childhood. The tone of the narrative was the same for all, warm, positive and affectionate. Participants appeared to enjoy remembering and sharing these memories with me and, again an idealistic image of halcyon days of childhood was conveyed. There were strong associations with a sense of freedom, play and wonder. Memories were vivid and romantic evoking images of children playing happily in streams and woodlands, free from responsibilities and worries, wrapped in their own world of sensory and imaginative play. Memories often included spending time in

nature with significant others such as family members, parents and grandparents for example, or friends.

Since my initial narrative interview question to client participants deliberately invited a biographical telling ('Can you tell me the story of the natural nonhuman world in your life? All the events and experiences that are important for you personally'), it is perhaps not surprising that childhood is a logical point to begin the story. However, I think it also suggests the important role of nature in children's lives. Additionally, the sense of nostalgia expressed in the tone of the stories gave me a feeling of a lost world. It is possible that this hints at an unconscious sense of loss in relation to the ecological crisis; loss of species, loss of certainty and freedom from worry.

Clients also spoke about key times of crisis in their lives where the natural nonhuman world played a significant role in supporting them and helping them through emotional difficulties and had shaped their sense of self in some way. There was a sense that this role was unique, perhaps one which could not have been provided by another human. Participants' narrative was infused with affect, evocative language and moving stories. The feelings expressed were consistent with a deep attachment; the natural world as an essential other in their lives. I found myself emotionally touched as participants shared these stories involving the natural and more-than-human world. These moments in the interviews felt intimate and infused with significance.

Client Helen shared her experience of an abortion fifteen years ago and described performing a ritual in the river which helped her to let go of her foetus which she brought from the hospital: '*I felt that the river would hold me in my loss in my grief and hold my baby and take that part of myself that I was letting go of to the sea…to the great mother, it felt cleansing'.* The event presented itself again in the second interview when we were discussing the CEE; the reason she had the abortion was because her partner at the time didn't want children because of the bleak future he believed they would face.

Another very moving account was shared by client Phil. When he heard the news that his wife had cancer the first thing he did was go to the moor and sit on a rock: *'It's just seemed like the obvious place to go to kind of um take in I needed to take*

in'. When sadly, his wife died a couple of years later despite treatment, he told me about a wild camping trip he took with his four-year-old son:

> *'I remember […] working through lots of different emotions sitting down that evening after he'd gone to sleep […] Okay, this is, it's me and him […] And it was just me and my thoughts. There was no hiding from them. And it's sort of almost a sense of kind of confrontation with, with yourself and your situation. [….] I remember sitting there sitting and crying and dealing with lots of things. And then ultimately, yeah, kind of leaving in the morning, you know, packing up walking away in the morning, and I think, you know, a sense of perhaps leaving some things there. In some ways, you know, following the river back down the valley and back to the back to the car and back to the real world.'*

I felt the moor allowed feelings to open in Phil that he had not been able to connect with until then. The familiarity of the place was comforting, the solidness of the rock felt holding, and the open landscape accentuated his sense of isolation and aloneness following the death of his wife. The moor offered a transitional space where he could allow his grief to flow, like the river he was sitting beside. His sense of '*leaving some things there'* makes me imagine the moor holding and containing his enormous loss.

5.1.3 Nature as spiritual practice

The language of participants sometimes became transpersonal and spiritual. In this case participants conveyed a sense of a deeper connection with nature that transcends the surface experience of enjoying the natural world. This theme was particularly present in the interviews with the therapists that identified as eco-therapists, Lee, Amanda and Rob. All three had shamanic influences in their development as therapists so it is not surprising that a more spiritual perspective was present in their interviews. For example, Amanda said,

> *'I think whatever people bring in the first place, it's so often about wanting a deeper connection with life. […] It's so often about healing a sense of separation. […] that is what's happening as these sort of ecological awakenings […] it touches everything because we are a unity of beings…'*

This was often linked to the therapists own spiritual experiences with the natural world. Amanda spoke about the profound experiences she had had on the moor:

> *'I realised I was being witnessed and heard by the moor. And that the whole moor was alive and intelligent and responding to me.*

> *You know, that was a deeply, deeply significant moment in my life that just shifted everything' (Amanda)*

And in Rob's case:

> *'that's always been driven, first and foremost by a sort of spiritual thirst for a relationship with this other that I felt in the land from my childhood, this sense that there was a um spiritual domain that existed in the natural environment that I could connect to when I was in the natural environment, and that was where I could connect to something er more than human, um something eternal and bigger than myself.'*

This corresponds to a deep ecology view of the human as part of and connected to the natural world and an understanding of the ecological self described in Chapter 2, section 2.2.

A slightly different spiritual narrative was present in Lee's interview. Lee has used shamanic practices in her work and runs journeying workshops. She told me about a client who had taken it upon herself to become a '*guardian'* of a natural spring. Lee drew on Celtic myths such as stories of '*well maidens'* and *'goddesses'* that guard the natural springs. Here Lee is drawing on the New Age spirituality of the sacred feminine. Both Lee and Amanda make this connection between the natural world and 'the feminine'.

5.1.4 Summary of Finding 1

Overall, participants' narratives gave an idealised story of nature; halcyon days of childhood, the restorative power of the natural world and the possibility of experiencing a vaster sense of being. Their narratives were compatible with Wilson's Biophilia Theory (Wilson. 1984) but in addition also seemed to draw on various popular cultural narratives of nature which were intensified during the pandemic where the population has been encouraged to seek green spaces and to connect with nature as a refuge from our troubles. As such, the commodification of nature as something to be utilised for our own benefit appears to be accepted.

The cultural narrative of the pastoral, a romanticised view of rural life, was evident. This can be partly explained by the fact that most of the participants have chosen to live in rural Devon and are invested in this idealised view of nature. However, it is notable that negative views of the natural and nonhuman world were not often expressed. When prompted some participants did mention experiences of the natural

world which were less than positive, acknowledging the sometimes harsh, uncomfortable and frightening aspect of nature. However, these comments were far outweighed by the positive framing of the natural world. The lack of negative experiences of nature in the narratives, this lack of shadow, I suggest is also defensive and I will say more in section 5.4.2.

Another notable narrative is one of New Age spirituality. Again, this is not surprising since several participants were from the area around Totnes, a town notable for its alternative culture. References to sacred nature, divine feminine, Gaia, indigenous wisdom and rituals were not unusual. One of the clients, Helen, drew on this quite a lot initially but later in the interviews talked about being more '*bookish'* and I had a sense that she had developed her more alternative self as a way of fitting in to Totnes culture having moved from London some years previously.

It is also necessary to consider that all the participants were white and middle-class. One has to question, therefore, whether this idealised natural world is equally available to all. A recent report commissioned by the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Glover, 2021), showed a significant disparity between groups who access natural environments such as national parks. The report highlighted black, Asian and minority ethnic groups and those from lower socio-economic groups were especially disconnected resulting in a perception that the countryside is a 'an exclusive, mainly white, mainly middle-class club, with rules only members understand' (Glover, 2021, p.15).

5.2 Finding 2 – Clients and therapists don't talk about the CEE in a direct way

Although clients and therapists all acknowledged the human caused climate crisis (*'I think human beings in general have totally messed it up'* – Elaine), participants reported that direct references to the CEE are made very rarely in therapy sessions. Clients told me their feelings about the CEE would not be something that they would take to therapy. In fact, they often seemed surprised by my question, even a little bemused:

> *'but no, strangely enough, even though it would be probably a big part of my life and the way I think, you know, I didn't think it necessary to bring up in the counselling session. Mmm. Quite interesting.' (Sean)*

For Sean, our conversation was enlightening, '*an Aha! Moment'*, he hadn't realised he could talk about global issues in therapy. '*Strangely'* suggests that having considered the possibility it now seems odd that he hasn't spoken about the CEE with his therapist. It reminds me of the psychoanalytic notion of the uncanny (Freud, 1919) 'where the once-familiar but now-repressed of nonhuman nature returns to haunt us' (Dodds, 2020, online). The uncanny has a frightening edge to it but at the same time it is 'the entrance to the former Heim [home] of all human beings' (Freud, 1919, p.245), it is 'frighteningly alien and strangely familiar' (Dodds, 2020, online). To speak of the CEE and what it means brings us face to face with the 'primal uncanny' where we meet the blurred boundaries between human and animal, life and death (Creed, 2005, cited by Dodds, 2011, p.118).

Sean's '*necessary'* suggests that he has a sense of what is expected in therapy, what is required of him, almost a transactional framing of the process, a client job description if you will. It may also refer to what is required in relation to what he has come to therapy for. Clients want to make use of the limited time they have with their therapists, typically one hour a week, to talk about what is affecting them in their day to day lives. There is competition for time between the various concerns that the client could talk about. This time is valuable, and for private clients is costly, so prioritising what to discuss would seem sensible. However, the clients I spoke to said they usually come to each session *without* a clear idea of what they want to talk about. They wait to see what comes up. This suggests a more open and liminal space where the potential exists for all sorts of topics to be explored and for a movement between inner personal worlds and the outer sociopolitical world, which includes the CEE.

Clients seemed more likely to talk about the CEE if their therapist was known to be climate-aware or an eco-therapist. In this case, it is likely that the client has sought out the therapist for this reason. Some therapists mentioned that clients are more likely to talk about global issues towards the end of therapy, suggesting that once their personal crises had been resolved they would be able to move on to thinking about wider issues that are affecting them. It may also be that the relationship between therapist and client has developed sufficient depth and trust that a wider range of topics can be discussed. Overall, it suggests that sufficient time is needed in the therapeutic process for the topic of the CEE to be explored.

Although direct references to the CEE were rarely made by clients, particular moments seemed to occur that presented opportunities when the CEE could be talked about in therapy sessions. These moments were called 'side-mentions' by therapist Jenny.

5.2.1 Clients make side-mentions

Clients seem to make 'side-mentions' about the environment such as commenting on an event like local flooding or mentioning their pro-environmental behaviours such as going plastic-free and recycling. They may talk about their pets, or enjoying being out in nature. Therapists told me that they tend to receive these side-mentions as small talk and not related to the client's therapy.

However, when clients make such side-mentions they could be either signaling a concern that is not yet fully formed as a conscious thought/feeling, or testing the water, 'Is this something that I can bring to therapy?' What puzzled me was why therapists did not open these side-mentions up for deeper exploration in the same way they might if a side-mention was made about other issues in the client's life. Therapists are trained to listen out for what is not said, what is alluded to or what is only on the edge of a client's awareness. Difficult and sensitive issues such as abuse, sexuality, self-harm and suicidality are frequently encountered and worked with in therapy. In contrast, when a side-mention is made that may have relevance for the CEE, therapists told me they tended not to open this up and take it any further. It was as though the therapists had suspended their curiosity, possibly even a blind spot around it suggesting a form of disavowal, a knowing about the seriousness of the CEE and at the same time reducing its significance in the context of the therapeutic encounter.

At such points in the interviews, my clinical supervisor self was mobilised in a transference dynamic and I wanted to ask questions such as 'how might this be related to the client's history?' or 'what were you feeling when the client mentioned this?' At other times I wanted to challenge the therapist as to why they were not seeing and hearing what I could clearly see and hear. I wanted to persuade them that they **should** be exploring these side-mentions with clients. On reflection the therapist may well have consciously decided not to explore the side-mention further for good reason and my impatience signals that my activist self had been mobilised through

transference. I also understand this as my own defence, my attempt to get rid of my own barely contained anxiety by passing it on to the participant (Weintrobe, 2021). These dynamics between myself and the participants hint at possible parallel unconscious defences at play in the therapeutic encounter; the therapist avoiding a topic that could trigger uncomfortable feelings which would be difficult to contain. I will discuss this further in section 5.4.

A particular type of side-mention was related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Therapists said that during the early days of lockdown clients spoke about the natural environment more often. Clients noticed the absence of cars and planes, the sound of birdsong and the cleaner air and would mention this. They were spending more time outside in nature and appreciating it more. Again, these comments were not opened up for further discussion in relation to the CEE despite clients telling me in the interviews that they perceived a link between the pandemic and the CEE. Clients spoke about the virus being a sign that the Earth was '*telling us off'*, that it was a '*re-direction'*, that we were being made to '*stop and think'* and '*to re-assess'*.

I see the pandemic as creating an opportunity, a portal into the CEE, for clients and therapists to jointly explore more deeply the planetary crisis and the feelings it evokes. 'COVID-19 and climate change both call on us to explore the strange ecology of nature that swirls around and through us, and threatens to destroy us' (Dodds, 2020, online). COVID-19 represents the ebb and flow between human and nonhuman, the individual and the collective, technology and nature, the living and the dead (Dodds, 2020). It has reminded us of our fragility, individually and societally. Participants did not choose to explore this, however, and these types of comments were treated as a side-issue to the main focus of the therapy. I return to this finding in Chapter 7, section 7.2.1 'The rules of therapy'.

5.3 Finding 3 – Clients and therapists have explanations for the puzzle: what therapy is for

What interested me in the interviews was an apparent contradiction between the relative importance placed on the natural world by therapists and their clients, and the lack of reference to the climate emergency by either clients or therapists in therapy sessions. The puzzle was: if the natural world is so important to them and they value it so highly, why does distress regarding the damage being done to it not

feature in therapy sessions? And if the client mentions something in relation to the environment, why do therapists not explore this with them? There seemed to be a simultaneous seeing and not seeing, turning a blind eye, a knowing and not knowing; in other words, a disavowal.

During the interviews I invited participants to reflect on their decisions about what to explore in therapy sessions to try to make sense of the puzzle. The explanations that developed with both therapists and clients centred around a common over-arching theme of 'What therapy is for'. There were differences within this between therapist and client participants leading to several sub-themes. Therapists, drew on a discourse of professional and ethical practice to solve the puzzle, whereas clients drew on a popular understanding of what therapy is for.

5.3.1 Sticking with the client's issues

A common observation amongst the participants was the way in which personal issues, not surprisingly perhaps, take center stage in therapy. Clients are generally concerned with self and inter-personal relationships, often presenting in some kind of crisis and seeking help for this. The suggestion by the therapists was that clients are *unable* to consider broader sociopolitical. As Lester put it, they are '*in a narcissistic bubble… essentially very self-absorbed'*. The reasoning seems to be that there is a hierarchy of therapeutic needs. Clients cannot think about the CEE because they have much more pressing problems to solve in the present; the CEE is a distant problem. This is consistent with my own experience as a therapist but is also at odds with the literature suggesting eco-distress is on the increase (Croasdale et al. 2023; Clayton et al. 2017).

The narrative of the therapists suggested that they place responsibility for choosing whether to talk about CEE firmly with the client. At the time, I felt that this rather lets the therapist off the hook of deciding whether to explore more broadly around what troubles the client but it is important to acknowledge that this approach is congruent with the modalities represented in my sample and reflects a respect for client autonomy. My interviews with clients showed that they were in fact concerned and affected by the CEE but seemed unsure about whether they should or wanted to bring this into the therapy, and how to go about talking about it. It suggested to me that clients need permission from their therapist, a clear signal that their feelings about wider global issues, such as the CEE, are appropriate to bring.

Therapists spoke about working with the concept of a therapeutic contract, aligning around a set of goals or outcomes for the therapy –

> *'so there's that kind of rush to develop a focus and the treatment goal, and stick with that and don't do anything else, and I think it closes it down.' (Nellie)*

They emphasised the importance of not bringing their own agenda into the therapy or of leading the clients in a particular direction. The therapeutic contract was offered as an explanation for not exploring clients' feelings regarding the CEE. Jenny for instance, doesn't open up side-mentions about the CEE from clients because she is '*more listening out for what that person is **really** wanting to bring in that session'* (my emphasis). The latent message here is adherence to an ethical approach that ensures safety and respects clients' autonomy. However, this disregarding of a side-mention as not really what the client wants to talk about could also be a defence, an avoidance of stepping into material that the therapist would rather leave be and I discuss this further in section 5.4 and consider the implications for practice in Chapter 8.

Client participants had a matching view. They saw therapy as being for dealing with small scale personal issues – '*the little stuff'* (Elaine) – of everyday life, and that the natural world and large scale global issues such as the CEE – '*the big stuff'* (Elaine) – are not relevant to the task of therapy. Participants saw therapy as a place to deal with relationship difficulties, issues from their past and for learning strategies to manage the stresses and strains of life. It seemed that participants had not thought about talking with their therapist about their relationship with the natural world and were often surprised by the suggestion.

Martin described the topic of nature and the CEE as '*highbrow'* and that one needs to '*get the foundations'* sorted out first, meaning the small scale personal issues. Elaine also said that she doesn't want to talk about it with her therapist until she's '*got the foundation*'. I think what Martin and Elaine meant by '*foundation'* is a sense of resilience, a firm base, which they need before the feelings regarding the CEE can be explored, perhaps because they are potentially of a different order of magnitude. I think when talking about the little stuff they were also unconsciously alluding to their own sense of smallness and powerlessness in relation to the enormity of the CEE. So staying with the little stuff is a defence against frightening feelings of

powerlessness. In this way, therapist and client explicitly and implicitly agree the therapeutic contract; in other words, 'this is what your therapy is for', and in so doing implicitly closing the door on the possibility of exploring broader sociopolitical concerns such as the CEE. This focus on the therapeutic contract is further continued and reinforced in supervision, when the therapist discusses their client with their clinical supervisor:

> *'Lee - With my own personal supervisor, you know one to one supervision, […] I would tend to be focusing on the really sort of so psychotherapy part of the relationship with my clients with with him […]*
>
> *Trudi - So could you say a little bit more about what you see as the psychotherapy bit of the supervision?*
>
> *Lee - Yeah, that's interesting. Yeah, I think things like looking at attachment patterns, looking at people's own personal history, looking at people's thought processes. Um looking at my relationship with them, you know, just me and them in the room, you know, without that bigger without that bigger picture, so it's like the micro, the micro level levels of the relationship.'*

There appears to be a general common sense understanding about therapy and what it is for, that is, the micro-level issues of self and relationships with other humans. It forms the 'conversation norms' (Norgaard, 2011, p.98) of a therapy scenario. The complimentary nature of the narratives of client and therapist participants show how these norms are shared and then go on to be reproduced between the therapist and their supervisor. A parallel set of social processes is established, both explicitly and implicitly in a strongly held therapeutic frame. I discuss the way in which the rules of therapy can either help and/or restrict therapeutic work in Chapter 8.

5.3.2 Sticking with my therapeutic model

Another way in which therapists explained the non-exploration of clients' feelings about the CEE is that they work within a particular therapeutic approach. The adherence to a therapeutic model or framework seems to provide an important structure and sense of security for therapists, a place to retreat to perhaps. For example, Nellie explained,

> *'But the kind of idea that relationship with other-than-humans is important but it's not well enough established in the sort of theoretical, […] I need the confidence to know that's part of my*

> *established theoretical model, in order to give me permission to just to do that exploration. I think that's what stops me doing it'*

Nellie needs the security of a recognised theory before she feels confident to explore this area with a client and reflects the growing demand for evidence-based practice in the talking therapies (Dalal, 2018). She told me she will '*fall back'* on her core relational therapeutic model, she knows she can '*go there'* and '*do that'* when she doesn't know what to do in a session. Although this ensures that Nellie works safely within her capabilities this falling back also suggested to me a kind of collapsing into, a retreat from something threatening. My thoughts that this was defensive were confirmed when Nellie continued:

> *'I've got my own process and my own things as well. So it's like I'm trying to hold my own, and and just be with the other in their experience of it all, and their thoughts of it all. And I don't think I'm trying to really do anything else, because it's almost like that thing of are you sure you're okay to offer offer therapy when you're experiencing something yourself? You know, there is that question, isn't it? Are you are you fit to practice? And, you know, is it okay? Is it ethical? But actually, you know, in this position we don't really have that choice, we are going through this same thing, we are sharing this, it is unprocessed. So it's doing my best to kind of just offer the core conditions and fall back on my training'*

In a similar vein, Lee said, '*I don't want to be directive or leading or you know, I'm not that kind of a therapist'* alluding to the importance in a person-centred approach of being client-led. The phrase *'I'm not that kind of a therapist'* made me associate to the phrase 'I'm not that kind of woman' and the judgmental idea of a woman with loose morals. There seemed an implicit judgement about therapists who might be more directive or leading with their clients.

5.3.3 Working to organisational goals

The setting of the therapy appears to have a role in whether clients' anxieties regarding the CEE are explored more deeply. For therapists working in organisations, the goals of the organisation serve to direct the therapy. This was expressed particularly strongly by Nellie who works in the NHS setting of an Increasing Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) service. She told me that although she believes our relationship with the natural world is really important she does not explore this with clients – *'I put my work hat on and I just go and be this narrower version of me with a narrower model'* and that '*it's not an evidence based*

model that you bring nature into the work'. She spoke about the pressures to keep the number of sessions to a minimum and to achieve outcome goals, something she refers to as *'performance pressure'*.

> *'[…] so I think there's been more pressure to keep the sessions to the sort of minimum that we need in order to get clients to a certain stage of recovery (laughs). So I guess that's, you know, been a performance pressure, like, oh, well, I've talked about x, y, and z, and they seem to be better now so that's worked, job done, you know, out the door (laughs)'*

It seems Nellie is in a double-bind – she would like to open up the material more with clients but is nervous stepping out of the rules imposed by the organisation. This creates a difficult tension for Nellie which she has to manage. It seemed to me that a defensive process was also happening. By shifting responsibility for deciding what to focus on in sessions from herself to the organisation it allows Nellie to lessen the tension and anxiety.

Like Nellie, Rob works in the NHS. His patients have complex and severe mental health difficulties. He described a pilot project he had been running providing therapeutic group work with patients outdoors and the outcome measures he has had to provide. The focus on outcomes and measuring symptoms before and after therapeutic intervention, serves to restrict the therapy he can offer. However, rather than diffusing responsibility as Nellie does, Rob seems to be skirting organisational restrictions by undertaking his pilot project. He told me:

> *'I'm taking them outdoors and doing the work ostensibly to treat the trauma or the personality issues or whatever, um but also with this curiosity of by doing it outdoors, by working with them in nature, by fostering in them a sense of this other that they can be in relationship with, um is that not only going to help them with these primary symptoms that they come in with, but it is also going to then through the fostering of this relationship have this wider impact, where they begin to see the natural environment as something that is alive, that's something that then supports them in their mental health or in their recovery, but then also begins to change the way that they relate to the environment and I see that as a much bigger sort of purpose really in doing, in doing this work […] there's something wider and on a more societal that can change through individuals doing this therapy in the, in the woods, you know, we we change our philosophical relationship to the environments that we exist in. That was probably a little bit off topic.'*

He seemed to have an agenda which is additional to helping to ease the patients' symptoms. When I compared Nellie and Rob I was struck by the difference in levels of confidence each had. Nellie tows the line whereas Rob finds a way to play the game and align with his own broader values although is '*off topic'* as far as his organisation is concerned.

These three sub-themes – 'Sticking with the clients' issues', 'Sticking with my therapeutic model' and 'Working to organisational goals' – underpinned a construct of professional and ethical practice and reflect the wider organisational context of the therapy and counselling profession. Therapists want to be seen as professional by colleagues, including myself in the role of interviewer who also happens to be a therapist. When bringing the relationship with the natural nonhuman world into their work with clients, it seemed that therapists may feel unprofessional or '*an oddity'* (Nellie) in some way and out of the main stream. Amanda for example, who described her approach as '*a whole earth approach'* and sees herself as '*in service to the Earth'*, has felt an outsider in the professional psychotherapy community of her city which has a strong psychoanalytic tradition. She said,

> *'[…] perhaps the conflict has been at times a trust in the in that what I was doing was relevant to others, to other professionals, that my work had validity, my approach had validity. So I do feel that's the way in which [it] has been challenging and the challenge to me would just then make me go quiet or invisible.'*

Professional and ethical guidelines are important for ensuring client (and therapist) safety but can also offer a defence against feelings of anxiety in relation to the CEE. Guidelines seem to correspond to a social defence against anxiety (Menzies Lyth, 1960) working through processes such as stressing the importance of therapeutic contracts and goals, the focus on outcome measures and the adherence to therapeutic models seen in training organisations. I discuss this further in Chapter 7, section 7.2.1 and when considering the implications for practice in Chapter 8, section 8.6.

I will now turn to the explanations given by the client participants for why their feelings regarding the CEE were not explored in therapy.

5.3.4 Others don't want to listen but it's not my therapist's fault

There was an assumption amongst client participants that people, their therapists included, generally do not want to listen to them talk about the CEE. Participants

spoke about being met with a roll of the eyes and that conversations were closed down very quickly. This assumption seems to be behind a general hesitancy to explore the subject and a vigilance about others' potential reactions which played out in the interviews.

Martin at various points in the interviews apologised ('*I'm sorry, this is a bit deep'*) or made a self-deriding comment ('*my children, their eyes will start glazing over at this stage'*) when he had been talking about his thoughts and feelings about the CEE. Similarly, Margaret apologised for *'being too serious'*.

At the end of Deborah's second interview she noted the difference in tone between the first and second interviews. The first interview had focussed on her love for the natural world; we spoke about her childhood and she shared lots of positive memories. The second interview focussed on the CEE and her concerns, hence was more troubling. She asked me how *I* was feeling – *'Oh, I wonder how you're feeling? Maybe you're gonna go away feeling really depressed.'*

I think she was concerned that I would see her as a 'party pooper', someone who brings people down. I suspect this is how she may have felt with others, such as family and friends. It speaks of a general societal pressure to appear positive, to avoid talking about the CEE which has the potential to cause distress and highlights the difficulty of finding spaces where we can talk about the CEE and our related feelings which can leave individuals feeling isolated and lonely:

> *'if I was to have this conversation with someone in the village, or my neighbour, or another counsellor, they wouldn't necessarily be.. I wouldn't have a connection, they won't understand. So I feel lonely, actually. Because I'm not able to share this' (Martin)*

Margaret expresses a similar sentiment. She has met resistance from others when she has attempted to talk about the CEE and this has meant that she has not talked about it in therapy. She said, *'it's possibly the idea that they won't listen. I know counsellors are there to listen, but sometimes they don't'*. So clients' understanding of the norms of therapy being about 'the little stuff' is compounded by their experiences of other people's reactions to them talking about their climate distress. The result could be an assumption that the therapist also does not want to hear about it leading to the hesitancy in bringing it to therapy.

Helen described her experience of trying to talk to her therapist about her grief about the CEE. Her therapist offered an interpretation that this was a projection of her grief for her mother who had been absent for much of her childhood. This focus by the therapist on Helen's internal psychological process and personal relationships rather than including the external sociopolitical reality of the CEE, is common (Totton, 2021) and linked to the idea of what therapy is for, discussed in the previous sections and further explored in Chapters 7 and 8.

Despite their reported hesitancy to talk about the CEE with others, all of the client participants spoke to me in the interviews about their relationship with the natural world and their feelings about the CEE. I understand this to be because I specifically asked the question 'Can you tell me about your thoughts and feelings about climate change and other environmental problems?' I signalled an interest and gave explicit permission. I also believe that through my verbal and non-verbal interaction with them I created a sense of safety, letting them know that I was able to listen to them without myself becoming overwhelmed. Elaine said, *'Do you know I've never talked about it for this long in any one time. It's quite amazing what I'm coming out with'*. Participants conveyed a sense of relief and/or gratitude for having had the opportunity to talk about the subject and reflect on their experiences which I discuss in more detail in Chapter 9, section 9.1.

When client participants reflected on the fact that they did not talk about their relationship with the natural world or the CEE in therapy, they seemed to take responsibility for this. Additionally, there was a latent sense of protectiveness and defence of their therapist. For example, Phil wanted me to know that his therapist was really clever at '*unpicking'* things and '*joining things together'*. Deborah went to the effort of emailing after the second interview to explain why she had chosen her therapist and asking me not to name her therapist in any published material. Sean completely let his therapist off the hook by taking full responsibility for what is discussed in his therapy sessions saying,

> *'I know it's my responsibility, because counselling sessions are you know, you've got a helper and a helpee and er you know the er the helpee brings everything to the whole context of the conversation as as, so I know it's it's my responsibility that I haven't brought enough about how I how I feel about that, how it affects me'*

This is not my experience of how therapy sessions unfold. Both therapist and client are actively involved in the process. I wondered how Sean had developed this sense of responsibility and whether it is an existing relational pattern or whether it is something particular to the dynamic with his therapist.

It seemed participants did not want to think of their therapists as lacking in some way. They are invested in the relationship and it may be important that they continue to hold an idealised image of their therapist. Helen who had not felt validated by her therapist did not express this to her. There are several ways of understanding this. Perhaps clients' disappointment, or in some cases even anger, is not expressed because of the power differential between client and therapist. Perhaps it reflects earlier relationships with significant others in some way. Clients could also be unconsciously protecting the therapeutic relationship since questioning their therapist's wisdom may impair the therapeutic alliance and hence the therapy itself.

The finding is relevant to what is and is not talked about in therapy, who chooses and who takes responsibility for this. I discuss this further in relation to therapists being more proactive in sessions in Chapter 8, section 8.2.

5.4 Finding 4 – Feelings and defences

In contrast to what seems to happen in a therapeutic context, participants were able to engage with the topic of the CEE during the interviews. I was able to explore their feelings to some degree of depth, offering empathic listening, reflecting what I had heard and supporting them with questions and interpretations to go a little deeper. As already mentioned, several participants expressed gratitude for the opportunity to talk about it.

As the literature discussed in Chapter 3, section 3.2 attests, we will all be defended to varying degrees around this subject because the CEE brings us in contact with our vulnerability, dependency and mortality. As such, it can evoke overwhelming feelings of existential proportions and it is necessary at times to protect oneself from such overwhelm. The interview data showed how therapists and clients can be defended in therapy sessions and, likewise, how myself and my participants were defended at points during the interviews. Despite this a range of feelings were apparent. Sometimes these were expressed directly and at other times were beneath-the-surface. In the following section the theme of 'Feelings and defences' will be

discussed as two sub-themes – 'we're all feeling it' and 'the many faces of disavowal'.

5.4.1 We're all feeling it

5.4.1.1 Grief and guilt – the story of the feather and the egg

One of the most poignant indications of unconscious grief came at the very end of the first interview with Jenny. She told me about a client who had given her gifts of a bird's broken eggshell and a tiny blue tit feather that she had found outside her consulting room. Jenny said she was very touched by these tiny delicate '*little gifts of nature'* and they were placed on her shelf in the consulting room. She felt they symbolised the quality of the relationship and connection they shared.

I wondered whether the client was unconsciously presenting Jenny with a symbol of the fragile parts of herself which Jenny was holding and caring for in the relationship. Jenny then told me that after the client had ended therapy, she had accidentally vacuumed up the feather. I felt a shock when she told me this, almost a physical punch. I gasped and just managed to stop myself calling out 'No!' I felt as though something extremely precious had been lost forever. I asked Jenny how she had felt at the time, she said:

> *'Oh, honestly (sighs). I had this real turmoil between do I risk my awful dust mite allergy which will send it off for the next week by actually trying to look through to find it. Or to just accept maybe it's gone. It felt big, it felt like a big thing. [Trudi: Yeah]. I felt really sad that that had happened, yeah (sounds sad)'*

To me this story is allegorical and carries enormous significance with layers of meaning within it. The tiny feather and broken eggshell seem to act as symbols for many things – the fragility of the natural world, our own fragility in the face of the CEE, hope and the generative powers of nature, the unsentimental reality of predation and survival in the natural world. Jenny's reading of the client's gifts is full of tenderness – '*These became quite treasured little objects'*. The destruction of the feather by the vacuum cleaner machine, symbolises man's destruction of fragile ecosystems. It makes me think of huge logging machines decimating rainforests. My shock is the shock felt when we come face-to-face with the reality of the CEE and Jenny's sadness signals some unconscious grief about the destruction of our fragile world. The turmoil that Jenny is describing alludes to the dilemma we all face in

relation to the CEE – do we act and inconvenience ourselves or accept the loss of species, land and people. As Jenny said, it is a really big thing.

Jenny's telling of the story in response to my question at the end of the interview ('are there any other clients that come to mind that you might want to tell me about?) felt like a confessional. Her words '*Oh honestly'* signal a truth telling, and her heavy sigh gives a sense of deep regret. I wondered whether she had felt the need to share her guilt and 'confess her sin'. She comes from a Christian missionary background although is no longer religious. She introduced the story by saying *'it's not really anything very much more additional, it doesn't take this any further'* suggesting some hesitancy and perhaps wanting to minimise the significance, another form of disavowal. Yet to me it was one of the most significant parts of the whole interview. It made me think of the way in which patients, just as they are leaving a doctor's surgery, mention the thing that has been worrying them the most.

5.4.1.2 More guilt

Despite my question asking about participants' *feelings* about the CEE, responses commonly focused on behaviours, a defensive distancing from painful feelings. Participants described pro-environmental behaviours they were doing such as buying local/organic food, avoiding plastic, recycling, reducing car travel and so on. These individual positive actions are important but the fact that they are telling me about them could be a way of heading off any potential judgement by me. At the same time, as a form of sublimation, they serve to soothe their personal guilt and signify a more mature defence than splitting and projection (see following section 5.4.2). There were also frequent rationalisations of the kind that we cannot '*single handedly save the world',* a defensive distancing from uncomfortable feelings of guilt.

Therapist Nellie was particularly apologetic leading up to and during the interviews. Although she wanted to take part, she was concerned that she would have nothing of value to add to my research. As we prepared to begin the first interview she said, *'I feel like I'm preparing for an exam. I'm a bit shaky'*. As we began she said, *'I'm not gonna be able to do this because, and I don't have, I don't have like, I work indoors, and I don't have outdoor clients […] I don't have anything to say'*.

Although it can be taken at face value that being interviewed can be an unnerving prospect, I was not a stranger to Nellie and I had made quite an effort to reassure her

and make her feel comfortable. So why such anxiety? I wondered whether the anxiety suggested some unconscious guilt, perhaps a paranoid guilt, that I would catch her out in some way and expose her failings.

Guilt was sometimes present consciously in participant narratives. Therapist Lee for instance, spoke openly about feeling guilty that she was not doing as much for the environment as some of her clients. There was also a sense of collective guilt amongst participants apparent in the use of the first person plural – *'We wanted cars, we wanted coal*' (Elaine); '*We need to change our ways'* (Sean).

5.4.1.3 Fear – dogs and wolves

Wolves and ferocious dogs featured more than once in participants' dreams that they recounted during the interviews. Wolves especially are strong archetypes of wild nature featuring in myths and folklore of many cultures. They are often depicted negatively and as something to be feared – 'The Big Bad Wolf' – but there are also examples of positive images of wolves being protective. They can be seen as both threatening and, in terms of conservation, threatened. Dogs represent man's domestication of the wild. The appearance of these symbolic animals indicated to me something of the collective unconscious (Jung, 1917) being presented, as well as something particular for the individual participant.

Deborah's dreams:

> *'I was dreaming about wolves […] there was a black wolf and grey wolf and each one was biting each of my hands but not in a really aggressive way. It was almost like they were just holding on to me. So it's like a kind of threat, but not, nothing really bad happened […] there was a strong feeling out of that of just the sense of my fingers really being clutched between very aggressive, very sharp teeth. But I remember it didn't hurt. It just was like, you know, when a puppy sort of just, you know, it was quite kind of, um, yeah, it was benign, anyway.*
>
> *Another dream I had […] there were two dogs. I was visiting a friend and one of the dogs was like a wild dog […] a bit wolfy but just a wild dog really. And it was going up behind a very sweet I think like retriever type dog. And it just pounced. It was, yeah, the wild dog was walking along the kitchen countertop, and then it jumped down and just bit into the neck of the other dog and just killed it right then. It was blood everywhere. It was really shocking. And my friend who owned the dog that was killed, couldn't speak, she just went completely mute.'*

Robs dream:

> *'Um I had a dream before the night before the group started, um in which me and my co-facilitator were at the place where we were going to be running the group in the woods, and um we, I think we were sort of inside the shelter and we looked out into the woods and we could see that there were lots of dogs in the woods. And my co-facilitator asked me something like, is it safe? Are we going to be safe? You know, could see all of these like rottweilers or, you know, something like that, you know, really sort of nasty looking dogs um and then they turned into wolves. They transformed from dogs into wolves. And I you know, I can't, I said something to my co-facilitator about, you know, needing to I dunno needing to still go out into the woods, needing to still be there. Um and I had this sort of sense of our own fears as facilitators about engaging with wildness um but also these dogs as being our clients, domesticated, and possibly angry, you know, there's some there's some ferocity in their domesticated state that was sort of unnatural and scary in itself and then they turned into wolves, er which felt in some way, much safer (laughs) or not safe but (pauses) um like something that we could be alongside, their wolf state'*

My associations to the dreams, and those gained through data panels, led to themes of re-wilding, a fear of the wild within nature as well our own potential wildness, and ultimately a fear of an apocalyptic future. Wolves were the top predator in the UK and there has been debate about reintroducing them in a rewilding process to re-establish ecological balance (Monbiot, 2014). However, there is ambivalence about this. Deborah describes the wolves as holding on to her with very sharp teeth but in a puppy-like way. Is her own wildness being held back in some way? Is she afraid of allowing her anger and hate regarding what is happening to be expressed?

In Deborah's second dream, the brutal killing of the 'sweet' dog by the 'wild dog' takes place in the domestic everyday setting of a kitchen. The juxtaposition of this with the blood and horror accentuates the shock. In Rob's dream when the dogs transformed into wolves they felt safer. His words regarding the dogs, '*there's some ferocity in their domesticated state'* to me capture a key message in the dreams. The threat to our planet comes from humans, we are causing catastrophic climate change and environmental destruction and we fear our own potential for destructiveness – the ferocity of our domesticated state.

The image of the wild dog walking along the top of the kitchen counter conjured up further images of societal collapse and an apocalyptic future where wild dogs/wild

people roam free and we have to protect ourselves, our property and our resources. Rob seems to have faced this fear a little more. In his dream, he tells his colleague that they still needed to go into the woods, despite the fear of the dogs.

In Deborah's second dream, her friend 'went completely mute' – she was unable to speak of the killing. Deborah told me in another part of the interview that her friends sometimes cannot relate to her sense of responsibility towards global issues such as the CEE. She feels silenced by her friends when she tries to speak about climate change and said *'It's kind of like screaming, and no one can hear your voice'.* This suggest a wider social taboo which I discuss further in Chapter 7.

5.4.1.4 Anger or powerlessness

Anger was expressed less often but generally directed towards those that participants viewed as unconcerned about the CEE or pretending to be concerned, or those who think they have all the answers. Lester said *'you just wanna hit 'em over the head'*.

As I have already mentioned, I sometimes felt frustrated with participants in the interviews, particularly the therapists who were not exploring clients' feelings about the CEE. My thoughts were 'why are you not dealing with this?' My own feelings are worth reflecting on. At times, I think I was defended, projecting my own numerous failures to act onto my participants and then feeling angry with them. This is easier than acknowledging my own avoidance of facing the reality of the CEE, or lack of resolve to act in certain pro-environmental ways such as engaging in more regular environmental activism. However, my feelings could also be indicative of anger in the participants which was beneath the surface, anger which perhaps they felt uncomfortable expressing. It is hard to be angry with friends and family who may not be acting in pro-environmental ways for instance, and this anger is often repressed and unexpressed. Through a process of projective identification, as the interviewer I carried the anger for them.

Rob had something interesting to say about anger in relation to the CEE. He said,

> *'I think so much of the work seems to often be about as well, people not really being able to access their anger um and needing to be angry but having been quite robbed of their right to anger. […]Um yeah, I think I think that's kind of intrinsically connected in some way to this question of, of our wildness. And, you know, it's often said, isn't it that depression is kind of symptom of unexpressed anger? Anger, or anger, that is that has imploded?*

Um you know, perhaps that has a relationship to your other question about why it is that we don't, that we're not able to be more actively engaged with this question of, of what's happening in the world, what's happening in our ecosystems in our environment? You know, if we're all a bit depressed, um we're not able to access our anger then what, you know, how, what do we do? Would be nothing, just feel hopeless, and despondent and powerless.'

Although he was not feeling angry in the interview he was acknowledging the difficulty people sometimes have in accessing anger and the link between anger and agency. This leads to the next distressing feeling apparent in the narratives – powerlessness.

Clients and therapists talked about feelings of powerlessness and/or helplessness – for example:

'*I don't know what to do, I feel very powerless again*' *(Margaret)*

'[clients have] *feelings of helplessness, how can they change the system?... I recognise this in myself as well' (Lee)*

'*it's very crippling*' *(Rob)*

The following extract from my second interview with Elaine illustrates how she was able to find a word for what she was feeling as we explored it together:

'Elaine - I don't know where to start. [Trudi: Yeah], not even you know small things that I could personally do don't seem to, you sort of think well, is it worth it? I mean, obviously, you know, it is. But is it gonna make the slightest bit of difference? [Trudi: Uh huh] So I've been thinking about that a bit. Yeah.

Trudi - And how's that been for you? These thoughts coming up?

Elaine - It's, it's quite depressing, actually. [Trudi: Yeah]. And um concerning. And I think nature is very good at making you feel small and insignificant anyway. But usually, they're good feelings. You know like when you see the mountains or something, and you think ah yes I am really only a tiny thing. But um this made me feel powerless praps is a better word, not just insignificant. Yeah, powerless.'

For other participants the sense of powerlessness was alluded to rather than expressed directly. For instance Deborah said that when she thinks of the CEE, '*it's like screaming, and no one can hear your voice'*. She then free associated to telling

me about an Afghan refugee that her parents are helping and the way in which he is powerless, just waiting to hear from the British government whether he has leave to stay in the country. Phil spoke about '*the magnitude of things'* and several participants spoke about the limits of what they can do as individuals, which again, alludes to a sense of powerlessness in the face of the enormity of the problem.

The findings described show the potential for distress that exists in relation to the CEE. It is not surprising, therefore, that defences were apparent in the narratives and in the interview dynamic itself. I will now turn to the sub-theme of disavowal.

5.4.2 The many faces of disavowal

A variety of disavowal defences were apparent in the interviews. Some were conscious and some were not. Some played out between therapist and client and some between myself and the participants.

5.4.2.1 Splitting and projection

Splitting of personal, ecological and political material presented in complex ways. Three major processes were apparent. The first, splitting a 'nature-destroying self' from a 'nature-loving self' was achieved in several ways, most notably in participants' narrative structure. The CEE was treated as a separate and distinct topic from nature as a nurturing and healing resource, and participants did not move spontaneously in their narrative between these topics without being prompted by me. In this way the ab-use of nature was kept separate from the healthy use of nature. Additionally, the CEE was often spoken about in technical and scientific terms and this was in contrast to the emotional tone when speaking about nature; '[the CEE] *is more of a matter of fact thing, perhaps, rather than an emotional thing*' (Phil). Participants depicted their relationship with nature as easy and unproblematic whereas relationships with other people were depicted as difficult. What is split off here is the fact that in our Western culture, our relationship with nature *is* problematic. It is extractive, exploitative, lacking mutuality and destructive. All these strategies ensure that the nature-destroying self is split off from the nature-loving self and individuals can experience themselves as nature-loving (good) whilst the destructive self (bad) remains out of conscious awareness as theorised by Hinshelwood (1993) and discussed in Chapter 2.

The second splitting process was the idealisation and fetishisation of nature. References to nature as dangerous and threatening were notably absent from the narratives. No-one mentioned recent natural disasters such as mega-bushfires, floods, hurricanes and droughts; all of which have caused devastation and loss of human and nonhuman life. Nature as dangerous and threatening is split off from a benevolent and nurturing nature. Participants were able to retain their idealised view of nature, whilst the natural world as destructive and savage stayed out of conscious awareness. This allows our dependency on the natural world, our vulnerability and fear to be split off from awareness. Jenny expressed it as '*we do just live a little bit in this kind of alternative reality that it's not climate crisis'.* This is the kind of 'double reality' that Norgaard discusses in relation to a 'socially constructed sense of everyday life' (Norgaard, 2011, p.5).

The third splitting process was the separation of an 'ecological self' that recognises our interconnection with all life and can identify with the more-than-human (Naess, 1989). Clients' presenting issues in therapy and their relationship with the natural world were seen as separate. For instance, Sean said he would become extremely distressed as a child when his friends caught wasps and bees and put them in a jar. Sean could not bear to see the insects suffering and would release them. As well as an expression of his ecological self, Sean's identification with the insects could also have been connected to his personal life in some way. Sean grew up in Belfast, a city *'associated with violence, associated with war, associated with conflict*'. I will discuss the relevance of considering possible connections between personal biography and our responses to the CEE in Chapters 7 and 8 .

The rejection of the ecological self surfaced in Sarah's interview as a phobia. Sarah told me about her fear of dogs. It is *'the scratching and the biting'* she fears. She sees this fear as something pathological, something she needs to be cured of rather than as her own animal response to another animal perceived as dangerous. As she described her fear I felt my own embodied affect, a prickly skin, a tenseness, a slight rise in heart rate. These responses are physical, outside of conscious control and associated with the primitive fight, flight, freeze response of our animal bodies. Sarah seems to want to be cured of her animal self.

Rob's dream described in section 5.4.1.3 above can also be interpreted as a split between the wild and the domesticated. Fierce dogs were distinct from wild but less dangerous wolves in the forest. I see this as mirroring both a psychic split between our animal self and our cultured self and a broader sociopolitical split between man and nature. By keeping our animal self out of conscious awareness we remain disconnected from all that we associate with animals, primarily our physical drives and aggression, as well as our dependency on the more-than-human web of life. We can continue as a 'domesticated' society to destroy and threaten the natural environment.

To varying degrees, the therapists I spoke to seemed to have split off a part of themselves in respect to working with the CEE. Those who identified as eco-therapists (Amanda, Lee and Rob) were more likely to include their own ecological self in their work with clients. They would work with the relationship with the natural world more readily and comfortably, seeing themselves as '*in service to the Earth'* (Amanda). The remaining therapists (Sarah, Jenny, Lester and Nellie) seemed less connected with this aspect of themselves when working with their clients, even though they expressed a personal love and concern for the natural world. Nellie described working with a '*narrower version'* of herself. Some participants spoke about the need to put their own feelings to one side regarding global issues such as the CEE, of having to stay firm, whilst working with their clients. Lee expressed that she needed to *'stay strong'* for the clients. This bracketing of feelings about the CEE by therapists is necessary in order to be able to work in the best interests of the client. However, it could also signify a defensive unconscious splitting off of their eco-political self which could result in missing the client's edge-of-awareness distress about the CEE.

Such split off feelings were projected onto others. Therapist participants often projected them onto their clients (for example, 'clients feel powerless'; 'clients are afraid') and client participants often projected feelings onto abstract 'people' – '*people who are urban orientated, in towns and cities, they don't feel safe in nature, [they] see nature as a threat'* (Martin). This projective process can be clearly seen in this extract from Jenny's interview as she switches from first person to third person which I have emphasised in bold:

> *'I guess like with all of **us** living in **our** in **our** lives in **our** bubbles to some degree […] not necessarily fully engaging with things that are actually so huge and so on the horizon, […] yes there's a concern, but what you know, what energy resource, whatever do **they** have really at this point to engage with that in a way that feels meaningful?'*

I interpret this switch as a defensive strategy. Jenny initially acknowledges that she is not engaging with the CEE – '***our** lives in **our** bubbles'* – then as she connects with the reality being '*huge and on the horizon'* she projects the lack of engagement onto her clients, '*whatever do **they** have'* to engage with it.

5.4.2.2 Avoidance and distancing strategies

There were many occasions in the interviews where participants avoided speaking about feelings by using a variety of strategies. A common one was to resort to describing thoughts and behaviours rather than feelings, as I have previously mentioned. I would ask a question such as 'How does it make you feel?' and the participant would tell me about what they thought about the subject, or what they do about it. Another was to answer with 'I don't know' when I asked a direct question about feelings. This is a form of detachment from difficult feelings.

Therapist Sarah's avoidance was very evident and a conscious attempt to manage her anxiety. She told me how she creates a bubble for herself by allowing bad news to '*wash over her'*, by resisting '*fearful facts'* and '*not buying into lack of hope'*. This strategy of controlling her exposure to information about issues such as the CEE supports her to retain a positive and optimistic outlook and she gets angry with the media for only focussing on negative issues. Controlling her exposure to distressing news can be viewed as sensible self-care, a conscious defence to protect herself from feelings of powerlessness in the face of many sociopolitical issues, including the CEE. I wondered, however, whether Sarah's clients picked this up in some way and would then find it difficult to bring difficult sociopolitical issues to therapy. During the second interview Sarah became tearful when she told me she feels embarrassed that she does not keep up with the news. There was some shame for Sarah about this perhaps because she knows it is defensive and a distortion of reality. Hearing shocking facts about the climate crisis can be traumatising, especially if delivered without any regard for the impact on the audience (Gillespie, 2019) so it is understandable that Sarah's response is to defensively avoid hearing such facts. What

was interesting was my counter-transferential response to her telling me this. At the time, I felt quite dismissive and judgemental of her, seeing her as something of a 'lightweight', not able to deal with hearing the truth but it supports Randall's (2005) suggestion that the majority of the population project their collective guilt for the CEE onto activists who then carry the burden and this can lead to taking the moral high ground. In this case, my internal activist was mobilised as I defensively repressed my own traumatised self that is unable to bear terrifying facts about the CEE.

My own unconscious avoidance during the interviews was apparent when I awkwardly changed direction from the flow of the narrative. For example, when Rob spoke about his avoidance, he said,

> *'It's very, very difficult to engage with the subject of climate change, and destruction of habitats and the level at which it's happening, the level at which it's changing that that, you know, we're we're literally falling over the edge.. of a cliff. I don't know if we're able to really think about that, sadly, or I don't know how able we are. Er um it's very crippling, to even begin to think about it and so I think that we avoid it. The clients are avoiding it. I'm avoiding it. We're all avoiding it.'*

After a long pause of 10 seconds, my next question was, '*What about negative er experiences with the natural world?'* The pause felt uncomfortable to me, I was unsure how to respond. In the end, I was unable to stay with the catastrophic picture Rob was painting; I unconsciously avoided my own anxiety by changing the direction of the narrative. Although I was interested in whether clients brought negative feelings about the natural world to therapy, it felt incongruous to ask the question at that point. Rob followed my lead, however, and spoke about a workshop he had attended where the facilitator '*did a lovely little sort of opening exercise'*. His tone became upbeat and positive; we had successfully colluded in stepping away from the painful feelings whilst still managing to stay on topic. This tiny exchange between us illustrates the oscillation that happens as we all move in and out of eco-distress in order to protect ourselves from overwhelm. In a therapeutic setting it would be beneficial to notice and name this dynamic so that defences can be made conscious and used with awareness.

Another form of avoidance present in the interviews was to engage in wishful thinking. Some participants were looking to a higher being to solve the problem. For

instance Sarah believed in a benevolent universe that will help us and Sean emphasised that he had hope in the love of a God. Martin spoke of a '*benefactor'* looking after us rather than relying on science. What all these types of disavowal had in common was a child-like faith in a bigger, more powerful being that could save us, allowing participants to avoid having to address the problem for themselves.

A common form of disavowal was that of intellectualisation. Intellectualisation serves to maintain an emotional distance from the subject. For instance, when asked to tell me about their feelings about the CEE participants would often resort to a problem/solution type of narrative – greed is the problem, over-population is the problem, disconnection with nature is the problem, technology is the problem and connecting with nature is the solution, renewable energy is the solution, veganism is the solution and so on.

Participants sometimes used the words '*interesting'* or '*fascinating'* as they reflected on the CEE and their responses to it. The words suggest an observing self, a curious but dispassionate and distant relationship to the reality of the crisis. For example Martin said:

> *'We touched on it when I was at university. I became quite fascinated with and it, this may seem like a peripheral thing and it but you'll understand it is connected to the scientific side, I became fascinated by the idea of the agricultural revolution, which we touched on at university and anthro anthropocentrism, man at the centre. So I found this so fascinating um reading around it and I've been reading about it since I've left University.'*

Martin's fascination with the topic serves several defensive functions. He effectively maintains a distance from difficult emotions by maintaining a 'scientist' position and treating the CEE as an abstract concept. He can also be a bystander allowing himself to be entertained ('*fascinated'*) rather than disturbed (Norgaard, 2011).

Client Deborah gave another good example of this defence when talking about how she might bring the subject of the CEE into her therapy sessions:

> *'And but the last time we talked [with her therapist], I said something like, 'I really want to get stuck into all these books about, you know, the environment and climate change' and she said, 'Well, let's bring that into the therapy more'. And I thought, brilliant, because I kind of want to have that conversation [….]*

I've got literally stacks of [books] I want to start, get stuck into, and I don't know where to begin. Well, I really want to do it.'

As she was speaking she showed me the books on her 'to read' pile one after the other and I felt overloaded and weighed down. When she says *'I don't know where to begin'* she could be hinting at potential overwhelm. Using books as a way into a conversation with her therapist may give Deborah a way in to her own emotions in a manageable way; speaking about the subject intellectually means she can think about the feelings before she experiences them. This would make them less overwhelming.

I have reflected on my own pursuit of this PhD as similarly defensive. By engaging with the subject matter through an academic process I am effectively distanced from my emotional responses from it. In interviews it was easy and satisfying to engage in this type of discussion with participants, especially therapist participants. I could pretend that this was purely academic, any anxiety was deflected towards the challenge of completing and achieving my PhD!

Humour was commonly used as a deflection to lessen the impact of uncomfortable feelings. Participants laughed frequently in the narratives after speaking about something which made them feel sad, angry, afraid or guilty for instance. Elaine told me about feeling upset when her neighbour wanted to cut down a tree:

'Elaine - I get very upset if they want to chop down a tree.

Trudi - Yes.

Elaine - My neighbour had ash die back and asked to chop one down (laughs), and evidently I wasn't very pleasant about that. She said it will fall on your Conservatory I said yeah well, I'd rather have no conservatory (laughs) and rather 'ave me tree.'

Her laughter lessens the anger she felt towards her neighbour as well as distancing her from the sadness of the dying tree.

5.5 Finding 5 – Neoliberalism, class and power

Given the body of literature linking neoliberalism (Hoggett, 2022; Weintrobe, 2021; Weintrobe, 2020) and social injustice (Mowat, 2022) to the CEE (see Chapter 2, section 2.4), it was important that I analysed the data with this in mind. Interrogating the data with a sociopolitical lens was helpful in adding further understanding to what happens in a therapeutic context when considering the CEE.

5.5.1. Neoliberal ideology

Participants' narratives frequently reflected neoliberal ideology. It took several readings of the interview transcripts and reflecting on theoretical ideas before I was able to discern this particular discourse. As someone who has grown up through the 1970's and 1980's, neoliberalism is the only culture I have lived within. It is, therefore, taken-for-granted and largely invisible until I consciously look for it.

Neoliberal ideology underlies a belief that the individual has the freedom to make choices and, therefore, is responsible for their own destiny including their mental health. As therapist Sarah said,

> *'it would be easy to become depressed. But it always comes down to an individual to, to pay attention to that which they can change' […] anxious clients that have haven't learned any skills in terms of managing their thoughts, that they, that they are sponge for negative media, and, and then um perpetuate that by allowing their thoughts to run wild'*

In relation to the CEE, participants' frequent accounts of their positive pro-environmental behaviours indicate a belief in their personal responsibility to act in an environmentally ethical way in order to solve the crisis. Margaret said *'I've got to sort out for myself, what I'm going to do about it, and then do it*'. There was surprisingly little in the way of criticism of the government or corporations to make changes and this reflects the cultural focus on individual behaviour change rather than broader system change such as, for example, a shift away from fossil fuels. These accounts of pro-environmental behaviours could also suggest that participants were anxious. Perhaps having internalised the neoliberal narrative of individual responsibility they then bore guilt for problems beyond their control to solve. Their demonstration of green performance to me could be an attempt to alleviate the anxiety.

Neoliberal ideology also underlies the idea of self-care that was referred to by therapists in relation to themselves and their clients. The logic of self-care is that individuals should rely on themselves for their own care rather than on others or the State. The way in which nature is used as a healing self-help environment or therapeutic aid or even a doctor's prescription, as discussed in section 5.1.1, can be seen as a result of neoliberal ideology. We become user and consumer, nature

becomes used and consumed, and is not regarded as having intrinsic value or being deserving of care.

5.5.2 Class

The clients I interviewed were all private clients and all of the therapists had some element of private practice in their work. Private clients are likely to be middle-class, white and educated and therapists drew a distinction between their private clients and those who were referred through the NHS or other organisation, often because they could not afford private therapy. Rob said this about his NHS clients:

> *'I think that that for those clients, I think that [the CEE] is still really far outside of their sphere of experience and concern, you know, they're people that are just dealing with the day to day kind of very active trauma symptoms of trying to live with flashbacks and with serious kind of anxiety and panic and, and trying to keep a roof over their heads dealing with poverty and with not knowing when they're gonna have to be reassessed for their PIP payments, and you know, these this kind of thing. I think while people are dealing with that kind of thing, it's often you know, it's often not going to be there's not going to be much room for much more than that'*

Whereas his private clients are '*people who were already more open to a relationship with the natural world'*. This put me in mind of the phrase used by commentators of the 'gilet jaune' (yellow vests) protests in France which occurred during 2018 and 2019 over increased fuel prices. Protestors were criticised by environmentalists for being unconcerned about carbon emissions. The point made in response was that working class people have to worry about the end of the month rather than the end of the world (Martin and Islar, 2021). Similarly, Nellie who also works with NHS clients described talking about nature with her client as *'a luxury'*, reinforcing the notion that class affects how much we can afford to be troubled by the CEE.

Simply spending time in connection with the natural world is also class related. When working outdoors, Amanda spoke about clients having '*good waterproofs'* to protect them from the weather. Deborah had travelled to Canada to learn canoe making from Indigenous people and to Tibet for a spiritual experience. Elaine found she did not feel comfortable with the sailing community when she moved from Leeds to Devon because people seemed from a different class and so she stopped going out on the water and enjoying the wildlife. These stories from therapists and

clients alike highlight the role that class plays in our relationship with the natural world and how we engage with the CEE.

5.5.3 Power

5.5.3.1 Power in the therapy room

NHS patients and other mental health service users in particular have very little power within the mental health services. There was an undercurrent to the narratives of therapists working in these environments of oppression and institutionalisation for both staff and service users. Nellie was working with a '*narrower version'* of herself, Rob felt '*a pressure to perform'* but was '*under-resourced'* and Lester spoke about the crippling impact of safety processes that needed to be followed. In this way, oppression can be passed down throughout the organisations from the top through the staff to end users.

Private therapists can side-step this but as my participants showed they are still held within a professional framework of ethical practice which, as discussed, can be used as a defence against addressing the more hidden concerns of the CEE with clients. It also seemed to disempower therapists, to make them fearful of taking risks in the work such as opening up broader concerns beyond the client's presenting issues. The fear of being judged as working unethically or unprofessionally by peers appeared to stifle a freer and more intuitive approach. Amanda who identifies as an eco-therapist *'in service to the earth'* resolutely holds a position outside of the mainstream therapy world saying '*I've never particularly identified with the psychotherapist piece at all'*. It puts her outside of any easy criticism and in this way she seems to regain some power. I discuss Amanda's approach as a possible blueprint for a broader way of working in more detail later in Chapter 8, section 8.5.1.

5.5.3.2 Power in the interview

There is of course a parallel in the research interview where power is negotiated between researcher and participant. I felt comfortable and in a position of power when asking questions and the participant was sharing their experiences with me. At times, I felt therapist participants were anxious of being judged by me and sought reassurance with phrases such as 'do you know what I mean?' and 'does that make sense?' There were times when the power dynamic was reversed. This especially happened towards the end of interviews when participants wanted me to tell them

more about the research, how I became interested in the subject, what I was finding and so on. It was as though participants wanted something from me in exchange, perhaps an unconscious attempt at equalising the power. At these times, I felt more vulnerable and exposed. I wanted to hold on to my knowledge as power, to hide behind my role of researcher. At these points both subject and researcher were defended (Hollway and Jefferson, 2013, 2000). It is also possible that this is a parallel process (McNeil and Worthen, 1989) and mirrors what happens in therapy sessions in relation to the CEE as described earlier. By 'hiding' behind their role, therapists can avoid feeling exposed and vulnerable, remaining in a position of power, both therapist and client are defended. The defendedness of clients and therapists are further discussed in Chapter 7, section 7.1.1 'Splitting in therapy' and section 7.2.1 'The rules of therapy'.

Summary

In this chapter I have described the findings from my interviews with therapists and clients – the clinical strand. When analysing the data from therapist and client interviews, I was interested in the following questions:

- How has the client's relationship with the natural nonhuman world developed over their lifetime?
- What are clients bringing, consciously and unconsciously, to therapy that relates to their relationship to the natural world and/or the CEE?
- What are therapists receiving, consciously and unconsciously, from their clients that relates to the client's relationship to the natural world and/or the climate and ecological emergency (CEE).
- What is talked about and not talked about?
- What happens between the client and the therapist around this topic?
- How does the CEE impact them?
- What are the client's and therapist's anxieties and defences in relation to this material?

Early childhood experiences with the natural nonhuman world featured prominently in clients' narratives suggesting an attachment relationship. This often led in later life to an affinity with certain landscapes or more-than-human beings. Therapists and clients were comfortable talking about nature as a healing resource in their sessions but avoided opening up feelings about the CEE specifically. Instead, the CEE is

brought into the room via side-mentions which tended not to be opened up for further exploration. Feelings of grief, fear, guilt, anger and powerlessness regarding the CEE were evident in the interviews, sometimes overtly but often inferred, and this is in line with the literature on climate emotions that suggests eco-distress is prevalent (Lawrance et al., 2022). The findings illuminate the way in which unconscious defences in relation to eco-distress can play out in the microcosm of the therapeutic dyad. Individual defences which protect clients and therapists from such feelings appear to be maintained by socio-cultural defences of professional practice and socially constructed ideas of what therapy is for. Although a conscious maintaining of boundaries is important for creating a safe container for the therapeutic work to occur, unconscious social defences can have the effect of restricting what the client may wish to explore. In Chapter 7 I discuss the potential problem of working with overly rigid therapeutic frames and relate this to therapist modality.

Unconscious defences were also frequently used by participants and myself during interviews in a parallel process which further illustrates the way feelings and defences oscillate as we try to engage with the reality of the CEE. It also suggests that there is a significant challenge at every level to stay present to the problem. The next chapter will discuss my findings from the eco-activist strand.

Chapter 6 – Findings Part 2: The Political Lens - Findings from Eco-Activist Interviews

Introduction

In this chapter I will describe my findings from interviews with activists – strand three of the research. Together these interviews give an insight into the dynamics operating when someone becomes an activist for environmental causes. As with the data from therapists and clients, I have used the interchangeable lenses of the personal (by paying attention to the individual activist), the inter-personal (by considering the inter-personal relationship between myself and the participant) and the cultural (by drawing on social and cultural factors influencing the individual and group). I have also used reflexivity as an added source of data, paying attention to my own responses, questions and interpretations.

To recap, my overarching research questions were:

1. How are feelings regarding the CEE experienced in therapy and activism? Where are the similarities, differences and gaps?
2. What unconscious defences are employed in therapy and activism to manage difficult feelings? In what way are they helpful or unhelpful?
3. What do we understand about the task of therapy and activism in these times?
4. Are the current models, contexts and tools of therapy relevant for supporting individuals to deal with the emotional impact of the CEE? What else is helpful?

I found writing this chapter challenging; it seemed to warrant eight separate case studies rather than writing about the group as a whole. This can be accounted for by the diversity in the sample and may also reflect the diversity seen within activist movements. Although there may be one cause, such as achieving action on the CEE, there are a myriad of ways of going about this from signing petitions, to writing blogs, researching, taking part in protest marches, lobbying government and taking part in illegal activities involving destruction of property and causing severe disturbance. Therefore, in order to discuss the findings in this strand of the research, I have found it necessary to ground them in some context regarding the participant sample.

6.1 Activist sample

The key features are given in the table below:

Participant	Age	Gender	Ethnicity
Carol	65	Female	White
Pete	67	Male	White
Luke	28	Male	White
Bob	71	Male	White
Simon	52	Male	White
Donna	53	Female	White
Steven	77	Male	White
Natalie	30	Female	White

Luke and Natalie were much younger and involved in animal rights activism. They regularly took part in anti-hunt actions and being an activist was part of their everyday lives. The culture of their activist community was quite different to the rest of the sample and this was reflected in their narratives. Theirs was a culture of anti-authority and an anarchist political ideology. There was an expectation that one should be prepared to make sacrifices for the cause and struggle for one's beliefs. During the interviews they were much more concerned with security of their data and were careful not to give me specific details of people, places and actions. During the interviews I found myself on unfamiliar territory, not feeling as comfortable as I did in the previous clinical sample or with other participants in this activist sample. I was sometimes uneasy with their extreme ideas and actions and at times concerned for their safety as they embarked on dangerous actions. They seemed much younger than their chronological ages and this may have instilled a protective parent response in me (I discuss transference dynamics that occurred between myself and participants in Chapter 9). They seemed quite resistant to talking about feelings and both expressed surprise that they found the interviews more emotional than they had expected.

The remaining participants were older. Carol and Steven were members of XR and had been involved in activism throughout their lives joining marches for issues such as nuclear weapons and the Iraq war. They struck me as activist stalwarts, always on

the side of social justice. Both were facing a sense of diminishing physical vitality, Carol because of a chronic illness and Steven because of his aging. Carol was isolated and disabled by her illness whereas Steven was still active, but very aware of the diminishing years ahead of him and was immersed in spiritual exploration.

For Bob, joining XR was his first involvement in direct activism. His life had involved a great deal of international travel and he had amassed considerable material assets. I interviewed Bob at his home, a beautiful old manor house with large grounds. As a grandparent he felt guilt and concern for the future world his grandchildren would live in and this was his motivation for engaging with activism. He saw XR as something he could join because it was '*not the crazy gang'*. I imagined he would see Luke and Natalie as part of the crazy gang! What he saw in XR were people he could identify with, professional people of a similar age who wanted to engage in non-violent actions.

Pete was a counsellor, a practicing druid and interested in eco-therapy. He was a member of XR but involved on the periphery rather than in direct actions. His role was phoning people on the contact list to keep in touch and update them on campaigns. His narrative was full of dreamy Romantic reverie, perhaps as a means of coping with the distressing reality of the CEE. He read me poems he had written, spoke about his awe of nature and told stories of his connection with the other-than-human world. At times it was as though he was floating off to another place.

Simon and Donna are a married couple. They are both spiritually minded and engage in practices such as meditation, prayer circles and nature based rituals. They took part in XR actions during 2018 and 2019 although they had some ambivalence about it. Although they agree with XR's approach and underlying philosophy of civil disobedience, they found being involved in conflict situations with police stressful. Being involved in a huge demonstration was both uplifting and depleting for them. Donna was more open to talking about her feelings with me than Simon.

As well as these differences there were some notable similarities within the sample. All participants were white, middle class and well educated. They all lived in the South West of England. As such, they fall into a privileged strata of society and this was apparent in the narratives where guilt associated with privilege was either directly expressed or present beneath the surface.

I will now outline and discuss my key findings from the activist sample.

6.2 Finding 1 – The reasons for engaging in activism are complex and not always conscious

Reasons for engaging in activism were multi-layered and complex. Some explanations were manifest whereas others were below-the-surface and less conscious, emerging through dialogue and interpretation. The reasons can be broadly grouped into two themes, 'The right thing to do' and 'Achieving a sense of belonging and identity'.

6.2.1 The right thing to do

Participants engaged in activism because they felt it was the right thing to do. There were echoes of the idea of fighting a just war, '*a moral call to arms'* (Luke). There were two sub-themes within this, 'political and social values' and 'spiritual values'.

6.2.1.1 Political and social values

Many of the participants spoke about being influenced by values of social justice such as anti-racism, feminism and anti-war. For some, political ideology such as anarchism or democracy were important. Often they had been involved in past protests such as the Iraq anti-war demonstrations in 2003. As Natalie said, '*there are loads of things we need to fight for'*. For these participants, becoming involved specifically in eco-activism was an extension of their general political and social values and their activism seemed to function as an expression of these values as much as a desire to bring about specific change. For example, Carol spoke about her Quaker values and how this motivated her activism:

> *'I was brought up Quaker, and Quakers have a sort of mythology about taking a stand for what's right and speaking truth to power. And so, so there's a sort of Quaker sort of dutifulness.'*

For Luke, being a hunt saboteur is an expression of his anarchist values and his belief that any kind of land ownership is morally wrong – *'I do think that the fact that people can own land is like, those, like fundamentally incorrect'*.

Bob and Donna mentioned that they had been long time members of environmental groups such World Wildlife Trust, Friends of the Earth and RSBP and had been involved in nature conservation volunteering. For these participants, as they realised the reality of the CEE, their love of nature extended into a strong desire to protect it

by engaging in activism. Donna spoke of the UN IPCC report of 2018 being one such trigger which led to her '*experiencing climate change on a visceral level*' so she '*decided to take to the streets'*. Natalie said, '*I think I was pretty much born really liking animals'* and after learning more about veganism realised that she '*wanted to fight for animals, and …the planet in general*'. Similarly for Pete, '*as I become more aware of nature and its healing propensity, I feel like I really ought to do something to protect it'*.

6.2.1.2 Ethical and spiritual values

The second sub-theme for activism being the right thing to do came from ethical values and spiritual practices. Values of '*simplicity'* and '*living lightly on the earth'* and seeing the earth as '*sacred'* drove some participants to engage with activism. Carol and Pete practiced paganism and felt a connection to the natural world through this. They were also influenced by deep ecology and Indigenous practices, seeing humans as deeply connected with all of nature. For Simon and Donna, there was a more general sense of the need to live authentically, ethically and to make the world a better place.

Spiritual practices also seemed to sometimes provide a refuge from the emotional intensity of activism and the reality of the CEE. For instance, Pete said,

> *'I'm aware that that I probably do practices that, that take me away from that that anger into I, I like to meditate in the morning. So I do stuff that deliberately distracts me from the awfulness, the sadness, the or sometimes I avoid it.'*

Similarly, Steven said, '*I think activism can feel very noisy, and I and I can recognise that sometimes this can also be distracting from something else that may be equally valuable to tune into*'. I wondered whether the '*something else'* that Steven is referring to is the distress of the CEE and a few minutes later he stumbled with words as he worked out for himself the way in which his spiritual practice defends him from difficult feelings:

> *'You know, when I hear people talk about, about the kind of stats about, you know, what land we'll have, what areas are going to get flooded, all those sorts of things, I think you're right, I think my protection, just wham straight in. And maybe that's the sort of quietness. Maybe, maybe in some ways I mean, maybe, maybe, in some ways that sense of coz I of going into myself, as I know,*

> *there's a great deal of support in here [touches chest] wouldn't be and and you could call that spiritual.'*

He revisits this theme in the second interview as again he contrasted the noisiness of activism with the quietness of his spirituality:

> *'And that we're in this together not as a sort of matey kind of nuisance that like Priti Patel would see us as a sort of rabbly rabble noisy rabble. […] It's so much deeper than that. There's something very profound about collective, the collective consciousness.'*

I wondered whether he was elevating himself above the 'rabble' here, wanting to be seen as more than a mere nuisance, although his reference to Priti Patel may simply indicate a reaction to the current political rhetoric surrounding the issue of protests. The connectedness he experienced was '*profound'* not superficially '*matey'* and hence was something he identified as spiritual. The idea of a '*collective consciousness'* suggests something far reaching, beyond the individual and potentially even eternal. Perhaps the experience of connectedness enables Steven to deal with the ontological insecurity (Adams, 2016, Giddens, 1991) that the CEE presents him with. The fear of social collapse and human extinction may be alleviated by being experienced collectively. Individual vulnerability may be lessened as one experiences an expanded collective self.

6.2.1.3 The right thing to do – summary

Participants spoke easily about their values and what has driven them to do the right thing via activism and could have been explanations they were used to giving for becoming involved in activism. They drew on recognised political and cultural narratives such as the CEE being the great crisis of our time, the privilege of the Global North, the needs of the working classes, Romanticism and the beauty of nature, the healing power of nature, the greed of big companies, lack of action by government and so on.

At these points in the interviews I often felt disappointed. There seemed to be nothing new or interesting being said. As I wrote my field notes after each interview, I was often concerned that there would be nothing useful in the data and felt as though this was not getting us (me) anywhere! I wanted to go deeper, get beneath the surface to their feelings and defences. My reactions can be thought of at different levels. On the surface, I was anxious to obtain good data for my research but I also

held a deeper anxiety beneath-the-surface about the potential ineffectiveness of activism. I had been involved in a few XR actions and yet, at COP26 there were no substantial resolutions passed resulting a few weeks later in another UN IPCC report described as 'a code red for humanity' (United Nations, 2021). It is possible that my anxiety could have been a projection of participants' similar disappointment and/or anxiety regarding the effectiveness of their own activism. For example, Donna said, '*To be honest, I'm left feeling like I don't know if this is going to work. But I haven't got a better model*.' Yet another interpretation could be that I lost my researcher role and my therapist self became frustrated when participants did not readily talk about their feelings. All these interpretations, or others, are possible explanations for the disappointment I felt at times.

6.2.2 Achieving a sense of belonging and identity

The second theme associated with reasons for engaging in activism was seeking a sense of belonging and identity. These two aspects are closely related.

Some participants spoke about experiences of social exclusion in their lives. For instance, Luke suffered from social anxiety and when he joined an anarchist group he felt that he had '*found the weird people [he] should have been part of all along*'. Natalie also described being '*othered'* and '*different from the general population'* because of being brought up in '*an extreme religion'*. When she joined an anti-badger cull group she found people who were similar to her, they could be '*misfits'* together. Carol has experienced being an outsider in her community and her disability makes her isolated. These experiences of exclusion for participants may be another factor in their decision to join activist groups. The particular quality of activist groups as opposed to other social groups is relevant in understanding what is happening.

Participants experienced a sense of safety in activist groups of like-minded others, a feeling of being at home. They spoke about a sense of camaraderie and togetherness. They felt supported and accepted. For some, the safety was created by a framework to follow. Activist groups have plans and rules of operation which give structure and containment. Unlike some other social groups, there is a sense of shared values and purpose creating trust that the group is safe – '*I can join this gang'* (Bob), '*I can be part of this'* (Steven). The belief that everybody shares the same values may be a

fantasy, however, as individual differences are bound to be present. Such potential differences seem to be overlooked in favour of the feeling of being with '*my tribe'* (Luke).

As this motive for engaging in activism became more conscious during the interviews, it seemed to create some ambivalence for Luke:

> *'Trudi - Sounds like a mixture of feeling inspired, but also wanting to belong as well. Two things.*
>
> *Luke - Yeah. And I'm kind of almost hesitant to use, I feel like I'm sort of admitting that, whereas like, I would like to say more than I got there like myself, but'*

It seemed uncomfortable for Luke to acknowledge his need for belonging as a motive for engaging in activism. I sensed some shame here and my therapist identity became activated as I attempted to soothe:

> *'Trudi - it's actually really what you're saying chimes with, what a lot of people I've spoken to say that actually that the social aspect of activism is a really strong driver for people. That sense of belonging and shared purpose is really, really powerful and important.*
>
> *Luke - Yeah, I've read a few like stories of like, you hear those like absolutely disgusting stories of undercover policeman getting involved in environmental activism circles. It really, I guess you don't know really what they're thinking or feeling, but they always seem to be having like, a really good time being like, a real part of it and yeah, I dunno...(trails off)*
>
> *Trudi - Yeah, I wonder whether they then feel conflicted.*
>
> *Luke - Yeah. Yeah, they hide them away don't they. Seems like give them new identities.'*

I find this exchange interesting and can interpret it in different ways. For instance, Luke may be unconsciously concerned about my motives for the interview; could I be an undercover police officer? Even if not so sinister, is he expressing some anxiety about not knowing what I am really '*thinking or feeling"*? Alternatively, he may be speaking about his own inner conflict and perhaps feels an imposter sometimes, trying to create a new identity for himself and hiding the fact that he is enjoying being part of the group as much as believing in the cause. My own interpretations here, however, could just be my own projections; I have felt a fraud, an imposter, at times when describing myself as an activist. Of course, in an ongoing

therapeutic relationship these possible interpretations could be checked and explored together.

Belonging to an activist group also gives a sense of identity. For Luke, his activism is his work and Carol said,

> *'I don't necessarily do my activist stuff, because I assume it'll work. […] I'm doing this because this is how I live. This is who I am. This is you know, this is a part of how I function in the world'*

I think this identity was very important to participants and instilled a sense of pride. At the end of the first interview Natalie said, *'I do feel proud about these things'.* Luke laughed and seemed to enjoy telling me about the tens of thousands of pounds of damage he had caused. Perhaps Luke feels proud of making a mark on the world, even if it is damage.

Belonging is a relational human need and it seems that the group culture present in activist groups helps to create this sense of belonging and identity. As I have already outlined in the introduction to this chapter, there was a notable difference in the culture between the anti-hunt activists and the XR activists. Groups have their own vocabulary and group speak. For instance XR use the term 'actions' for protests, and actions can be 'juicy' if they involve the risk of arrest. Email communications are always signed off 'in love and rage' and the XR symbol is worn and displayed as a badge of honour. Carol spoke about the way in which the symbol serves to reinforce her sense of belonging and identity:

> *'when you see that symbol that every time I see it, I associate it with every other time I've seen it. So it's sort of charges me up with connection, connection to sort of past movements. And I think it's amazing when you get photos up of sort of protests all around the world, written in scripts that you could never decipher. And then there's the XR symbol somewhere where you go, yeah, you know, these are people sitting outside the Kremlin with the XR symbol. So just the fact that the symbol has travelled around the world. I dunno. It's hard to put into words. But when I see it, it's like I connect with it. I go, it's like, these are my tribe.'*

Similarly, anti-hunt groups have a short-hand way of speaking and talk of 'sabbing' (sabotaging) and Natalie described herself as a '*fem sab'* meaning a female saboteur.

Self-sacrifice is a strong theme particularly present in the narratives of the two younger participants, Luke and Natalie. Luke said '*seeing other people give up so*

much for a given cause is like, one of the most like galvanising factors in me to think that I can do more'. There seems to be an undercurrent of competitiveness though and he later said that he gets jealous if he sees someone else doing something '*amazing'*. Natalie said '*if I didn't fight for my beliefs I wouldn't have any integrity'*. With both these participants, I had a sense of them being judged by the collective other as well as self-policing, perhaps assessing whether they were doing enough, risking enough, suffering enough. It seemed that members had to prove themselves. Their culture did not feel inclusive to me. Instead, it felt secretive, which is understandable given the illegal nature of some of their activities, group members would need to be very careful about divulging too much information, but as a result I felt distanced from them. I found this interesting; part of their story of engaging with activism was their experience of not fitting in, of being othered. Was this another unconscious projection? Another way of showing me what it is like to feel socially excluded?

Luke and Natalie were also conscious of security and not divulging secrets. This sense of undercover work expressed itself directly when they checked themselves more than once in the interviews and told me they were concerned about giving away too much information. Natalie also told me that she couldn't speak to her family about her activism and that she has to hide who she is, being '*two different people'*. This secrecy could isolate her from people outside her activist groups, thereby cementing her as belonging to the activist group. At the end of the interview she told me it was '*nice to be open'* about her activist life, although I am sure there was much she did not feel able to share.

6.3 Finding 2 – Feelings are transformed through activism

The CEE evokes strong and difficult feelings which at times can be overwhelming. Engaging in activism seems to have the potential to transform these into positive affect, feelings and emotions in various ways.

6.3.1 People power

Through activism feelings of powerlessness can be transformed into a sense of empowerment. This empowerment was experienced collectively rather than individually, a sense of people power. Simon said '*being in that atmosphere with that many people is something very powerful'* and he felt '*energised and hopeful'* and

Donna spoke about '*seeing the power of that many citizens'*. In addition, the sense of doing something is a form of sublimation, a defence against the feeling of powerlessness. It seemed important to Carol to tell me how she had influenced things through her activism. When describing an XR protest which she couldn't attend she said:

> *'I provided the chant that they did, that people went away in their head singing. So it's like, I wasn't there but I watched it, someone live streaming it, and I oh, they're singing my chant now!'*

Linked to this is the presence of an idealised leader or prominent figures in the activist group. These individuals seemed to act as an inspiration and engender a belief that change is possible. Key names mentioned included Starhawk (activist well-known in earth-based spirituality), Gail Bradbrook (co-founder of XR) and David Attenborough. Perhaps there is a fantasy that these individuals will lead us out of the crisis – '*Thank goodness for David Attenborough!*' (Pete) but they also seemed to offer much needed hope whilst at the same time legitimising the activists' fears regarding the reality which many others disavow. I discuss hope further in Chapter 8, sections 8.3 and 8.4.

There is a strong sense in the narratives of standing up to State power in the form of the police and judiciary. It was particularly illustrated in Steven's account of being arrested. He said, *'the most powerful thing that the state did to me was took me from a group of protesters and singled me out'*. He acknowledged that he was scared but '*didn't allow it to come through […] there was a part of me thinking, No, fuck you, I'm, I'm not going to just lie down on this*'. He said he felt '*invincible'* and enjoyed the '*demonstration of people power*'.

It is important to note that Steven's defiance most likely relies on a trust in the decency of the police and the criminal justice system as a whole, born out of his white male middle-class privilege. A young black male, for example, might be much more wary of making himself a target for arrest. Steven used his privilege to represent those who were unable to protest. He shared his court statement with me and in it he said '*Also, because I am a white, highly privileged man, I have a potential to act on behalf of others who are the victims of this crisis, and that, for various reasons, cannot act to protect themselves'*.

6.3.2 An object for anger

Feelings of anger regarding the CEE and other political and social issues can lack an object and activism seems to offer the opportunity to direct generalised anger towards something. Participants could direct their anger through activism towards others such as the government, oil companies and other people perceived to not be doing enough. Pete for instance was '*aggravated'* by politicians who advocated fracking and by industries that '*savaged'* the earth. He told me he felt *'very angry. Very, very frustrated, very, very critical of the government'*.

Sometimes anger was not so outwardly expressed but I sensed could be beneath the surface. For example, Simon spoke about other people '*living in this little positive bubble'* unaware of this information which could '*wake them up to what is going on beyond EastEnders'*. Simon's tone remained gentle and calm as he said this even though it seemed quite a disparaging way of referring to others. The incongruence of tone and language made me wonder whether Simon may unconsciously feel angry with people who were not engaging with the CEE. I also wondered if Simon normally found it difficult to connect with and acknowledge his anger. He had described himself as a '*happy hippie'* wanting to *'transmit what is beautiful about the world'*. Anger is not a beautiful emotion. Taking part in a large activist protest may allow him to piggy-back onto a collective anger – anger by proxy – and it could mean he is able to avoid some of his discomfort.

For Luke, it seemed his activism was an outlet for a more general feeling of being let down by society. He was a Masters graduate in conservation but had been unable to find work in this area. Instead he was doing casual work and was unemployed at the time of the interview. The following extract, although confusing, suggested to me an underlying dissatisfaction in Luke:

> *'I guess that sort of ties back into like, a richness of life because I feel like so much of like modern living is kind of tailored towards like seeking comfort and then having hobbies, which is like I have hobbies, I like comfort as well, but I think that maybe as humans we're supposed to or at least if you do experience like more extremes in yeah yes like life I think can have more meaning. I guess like raising kids is like a perfect example of that. Or chasing a career is like more of an example of that. But it doesn't often you don't often experience things on like oh, maybe it is a form of tribalism I don't know (laughs) like. I think that's why I can I can relate to like maybe football hooliganism in that way. Not that I*

like am a sports person, but I can empathise on their sort of heightened yeah, trying to make life mean something to you, I guess. I don't know.'

It seemed Luke was struggling with an existential anxiety about the meaningless and boredom of modern Western life. His activism could be meeting a need for intensity and affect. His reference to hooliganism made me think of anger and destructiveness. His readiness to become an activist may have offered him a way of channelling his anger as well as finding meaning and a sense of belonging. During the second interview he had this insight himself:

'I'm sort of angry at like life or society in like a sort of slightly curmudgeonly way at this point for because I haven't been able to get a job in my wildlife conservation. So I think I'm using activism as a replacement for that, which works. Although it doesn't it's not very profitable (laughs). Even less than wildlife conservation (laughs)….. So I feel like I'm, I'm being wasted, I think'

Luke's activism may offer him some compensation for not securing a job in nature conservation. When I asked him how activism was affecting his relationship with the natural world he said,

'But it definitely you're not experiencing nature in like um in as much as like, in like, in the way that I was before, I guess, like being absorbed in it. It more feels like you're sort of sort of er fighting fight like so you're fighting or playing some sort of game with like nature being at stake.'

He went on to tell me:

'It doesn't I can I can get a lot out of like a bug that I find that like there's some moss that grows on my tiles and like I really like to imagine if I was like, really small. It would be so cool to walk in amongst the moss but yeah, so I just it doesn't take much for me to yeah,'

I felt really sad at this point that his time in nature and his connection with it was reduced to looking at a piece of moss on his tiles and having to use his imagination to immerse himself in it. When he says '*it doesn't take much'* I think he is saying his own needs for nature connection can be met by very little. This felt quite a contrast compared to his time studying conservation when he would '*go out a lot in nature'* and it was '*super cool'*. As he told me about what he liked about the natural world – '*I like weird stuff like frogs and newts and bugs and slimy crusty stuff (laughs)*' – I

was reminded of a children's rhyme and I wondered whether he was reconnecting with his childhood passion for the natural world.

6.3.3 Guilt and making amends

Participants often spoke of guilt. Sometimes this was spoken about directly such as guilt about frequent flying or of not being green enough. Engaging in activism offered participants a way of making amends for less environmentally friendly behaviours. For instance, Bob said '*I don't think I've got anywhere near where I'm living a sustainable lifestyle. But we're trying to do every little bit we can to redress the balance*'.

Bob's narrative in particular contained a lot of expressed guilt but there was also an under-the-surface feeling of awkwardness in the interview. When I arrived at Bob's home for the interview I was shocked at the size of the house and gardens. It was an old manor house with a gated sweeping drive and extensive grounds. I wondered whether Bob felt embarrassed, as though I had caught him out for being wealthy. There was something incongruent in our conversation about the CEE whilst sitting on his terrace sipping sparkling water looking out over the rolling lawns and borders. I think Bob may have been acknowledging this incongruence in his comment above, '*I don't think I've got anywhere near where I'm living a sustainable lifestyle'* and perhaps signalling to me, or an internalised other, his attempt to make amends, '*we're trying to do every little bit … to redress the balance'*. Bob spoke about the everyday decisions which present him with taxing dilemmas; whether to buy an energy efficient boiler costing ten times as much as a normal one, whether to take the bus or the car and so on. Bob was able to acknowledge both the 'good' environmentally responsible part of him and the 'bad' part of him that sometimes chooses the most convenient, least expensive option.

As already mentioned, all the participants were white middle-class educated people living in the Southwest of England and seemed aware of this with several participants making reference to being in the Global North for instance, or being white or middle-class. Natalie said,

> *'I'm highly aware that I'm also another like, white middle class person that I have a lot of privileges. And I don't really want to be like another white middle class person going like, hey, look at all this cool stuff I'm doing all the time.'*

When speaking about his choice to buy organic food, Pete seemed to be imagining the reaction of others when he says, '*oh look at you with your organic, you know, the fancy choice*'. He may feel uncomfortable with being able to afford the more expensive organic alternatives, fancy food for fancy people. The fact that class and race privilege was referenced by several participants may be because they wanted me to know they were aware of it, perhaps anticipating some possible judgement. For example, Pete said,

> *'...as a Western human being who's privileged and lucky enough to live in Britain. And actually, one, I don't have to worry about money. I'm not my car's pretty old, but I don't, you know, I really don't have to worry about money. And I'm very, very lucky'*

My reflexive sense of guilt regarding my own privilege that the interviews exposed lends some support to this reading of the data. I could afford to fund a PhD, something which Luke wanted to do but could not afford. Together with my husband I own a piece of land for food growing and habitat protection, something which Simon, Donna and Luke dreamed of. Alongside this was my fear of an envious attack by those who wanted what I possessed and a fear of being judged. However, mentioning sociocultural privilege may simply have been participants' expression of an awareness that is commonly shared and spoken about amongst activists in the Global North. Further exploration would be needed to understand more fully the connection between guilt and their sense of privilege. Without the opportunity to explore my interpretation further with participants, it remains conjecture.

Guilt could link to participants' sense of moral duty (see section 6.2.1), a responsibility for being part of the problem and this matches findings from other research (e.g. Coppola and Pihkala, 2023). For several participants guilt was associated with the thought of a ruined future for children and the younger generation. Bob spoke about this directly saying,

> *'my grandchildren range from two to ten, there's four of them, what sort of a life are they going to have? It could become extremely unpleasant very fast, unfortunately. We've got responsibilities about it because it's us that done it, isn't it?'*

He mentioned his grandchildren several times in the interview and asked me whether I had children. Bob may have simply been seeking some common ground between us as part of a conversational interaction, we could then both relate to each other as

parents, but he could also have been indirectly asking me whether I felt guilty too. He may have been asking whether we shared a common ground of being parents **and** feeling guilt. This speaks to a wider collective guilt for the CEE and the future being faced by the next generations. Bob's guilt was also tinged with sadness as shown through his tone and facial expression. I wondered whether he was imagining future losses in the world his grandchildren would inherit and that an anticipatory grief was just beneath-the-surface.

The findings suggest that engaging in activism can offer the opportunity for some reparation, particularly when we are aware of and acknowledge our guilt. There is a sense of taking responsibility, a desire to make it right. However, if done with less conscious awareness, it could simply be a way of soothing individual and collective guilt experienced by those of us with more economic, social and cultural capital (Bordieu, 1985), living in a part of the world that has been most responsible for the CEE but as yet least affected by it. A potential dilemma for those of us living in the Global North is that our actions may never feel enough, leaving us with a sense of inadequacy that for activists could lead to burnout, a finding I discuss in section 6.5 below.

6.3.4 Fear and the thrill of the ride

Fear was present in the narratives both in direct references as well as via allusions to war and an apocalyptic future. Bob spoke about it directly saying, '*it's a bit of a doomsday scenario'; 'It's a terrifying scenario'* when asked about the CEE, later saying:

> *'As soon as something is a stressor, it leads to war and then people are fighting each other all over the planet and that is triggered by shortage of resources. Land, isn't it? Land, water, water. Crazy situation isn't it?'*

Luke free-associated to post-apocalyptic films – *'a post-apocalyptic sort of wasteland'* - when talking about how he got involved in activism and I wondered if this indicated some fear regarding the future or just his taste in cinema. When speaking about blood sports he described them as '*grotesque'* and *'viscerally reprehensible'*. These words made me imagine horror movies, monsters and depravity. When I asked what his feelings were about it he said, '*It's like, red lights flashing in my head I guess* (*laughs*)'. The flashing red lights made me think of

danger and the fear that may be under the surface for Luke when he is out on a hunt sabotage and possibly more broadly when thinking about the future; he described the CEE as '*just terrible'* and that he could not remember a time when he was not aware of climate change, '*I've always lived under that'*.

During one of the data panels when extracts from the interviews with Luke and Natalie were being discussed, there was a free association to the idea of Luke and Natalie becoming 'the hunted'. The panel wondered whether perhaps this occurred through a process of identification with the animals they are fighting to protect. Certainly both were very careful about the information they divulged in the interviews about their actions. This could support the idea of feeling hunted as they did not want to risk 'capture', especially as I had informed them of the limits of confidentiality and that I would have to report any illegal disclosures. However, this is a very tentative idea and there was no opportunity to test it out with Luke and Natalie.

Simon told me that he was scared of conflict and had not considered himself an activist prior to being involved in the XR 2019 London action. He described a particular situation where the police were compressing the crowd of protestors, a tactic known as kettling.

> *'And then we realised that we were that everybody else had overtaken us and behind us was this wall of police. And then we met the throngs trying to meet trying to get into Trafalgar Square, so everything compressed, and the police started pushing. That was really intense. That was that was proper you know, a bubbling container being compressed into boiling, […] Aww everything, everything, really connected, terrified, not terrified, that's too strong, certainly scared'*

His use of the word '*intense'* suggest there was strong affect in his experience. He also told me that after returning from that action he felt a sense of momentum and *'had a kind of okay when's the next one, sign me up for the next one!'*. His words and tone suggest something may have shifted for Simon and rather than feeling afraid he was excited and wanted more action. Similarly, Donna said that she '*was one of those people who find [activism] scary'* but also said that joining XR *'was enormously exciting and liberating'*. In a slightly different way, Steven described his excitement of an XR action saying it was '*like the kids taking on the adults'* making me think of a teenage rebellion and the thrill of disobedience. It is possible that

during activism fear may be transformed into excitement for some people. It is also possible that fear **and** excitement can be present simultaneously or in dynamic relationship. For instance, Natalie said, '*So I feel excited, and I do feel quite fulfilled from doing it. … But I also on the flipside, they can be quite stressful and I do get nervous'*.

Pete used the words '*worry'* or '*worried'* throughout his interviews when describing environmental issues. The first activism he became involved with was something called 'The Warrior's Call'. The closeness of the words 'worrier' and 'warrior' in terms of spelling and pronunciation struck me as a motif for the possible shift that may occur when activists' fear can be transformed into excitement.

Luke spoke about his excitement in positive tones but also alluded to the addictive nature of activism. He described how he felt he had built up a tolerance for danger, *'like people who do drugs',* wanting to do more and more risky things '*have to get like more, do more drugs*'. When he was unable to take part in any activism due to having moved cities, he felt '*felt kind of edge-less or lacking in Mojo or something'*. This made me consider the role of adrenaline during high-risk activism and the potential risk of adrenaline addiction for activists, so called 'addiction without drugs' (Babić, 2018).

6.3.5 Pain and the comfort of togetherness

Several participants spoke about feeling sadness, grief and pain for what was happening to the earth and the way in which activism provided some form of comfort. Carol described feeling '*pain'* that hurts when thinking about the CEE. She spoke about the need for '*a space for honouring your pain'* and that '*you could very easily get swamped with grief. But there's something about activism, that just sort of makes it bearable'.* She also told me that she tries to limit her exposure to pain. Perhaps Carol fears getting '*swamped with grief'* and so experiences a tension – to feel or not to feel.

Donna expressed grief and loss about her grown up children potentially not having children of their own because of the CEE, and the possibility that she may never become a grandmother. She found this devastating and told me *'it breaks my heart'*. When Donna became involved with XR she saw '*how many other people really care'* and this gave her *'a lot of hope and encouragement and sense of community*

and support, and so much love and kindness and just unity. I mean, that was just such a beautiful thing to experience.'

As well as gaining comfort from the love and kindness of fellow activists, being involved in activism seemed to offer Donna a way to imagine an alternative future, for her children and unborn grandchildren; in Donna's words, '*a new start', 'a different way of living', 'a new Earth that we're going to create'*. Her words seem infused, pregnant, in fact, with birth and life, the very things that are felt to be lost.

As Donna spoke this I found myself sharing with her that my own daughters had expressed a similar sentiment. I think I too was seeking comfort from my grief by connecting with her. Having conducted so many interviews at this point, I felt a relief at being able to share a little of my own feelings. On reflection I realised that holding back my own responses to the CEE had been a burden. Perhaps activists feel a similar burden if they are not able to share their feelings openly.

As has been pointed out by other authors, the CEE can increase awareness of our mortality (Dodds, 2020; Adams, 2016). A particularly poignant example of the way in which themes of aging, illness, decay and death were present beneath-the-surface in narratives was when Pete told me about his experience of finding a camelia flower lying on the ground:

> *'And it was it was pink but it had been lying around for a few days. So that pink had turned to that brown. And I picked up this camelia flower (his hands are miming picking up the flower; his tone is full of awe and wonder) and it was like, I remember it very clearly, was like this being that had once been a ballet dancer but actually had died but had lived their life to show off this dance and to dress as gloriously and as beautifully as they could. And to dance in the wind and I picked up this this carapace this shell of this of this beaut- once beautiful dancer.'*

He went on to also tell me about a blue beetle that he found – '*I can't describe the beauty of that colour'* – and how it kept falling over despite Pete trying to right it. He wondered whether the beetle was approaching the end of its life. Immediately following these descriptions of the flower and the beetle he associated to his wife, *'And my wife is getting osteoarthritis in her hands. And so, you know, it's really affecting what she can do'*. I felt a real sadness between us at that moment. I imagined Pete's wife as a once beautiful lively young woman struck down by an aging disease. Pete did not linger in this shared moment of sadness, however, quickly

moving back to the beauty: '*I get touched by how beautiful this planet is and the natural life the life forms that exist'*. Love and loss, inner and outer seemed intricately woven in Pete's story about the camelia flower and perhaps connecting with the beauty of nature provided him with comfort for his sadness.

6.4 Finding 3 – Therapy is not relevant

When asked whether they had ever considered therapy as a way of managing the feelings associated with the CEE the general sense from participants was that therapy was not relevant or would not be helpful. The themes associated with this finding were 'splitting of inner and outer worlds', 'I don't need it' and 'activism is a better way'.

6.4.1 Splitting inner and outer worlds

For some participants there was a perception that therapy was for personal problems rather than for talking about global issues, in a sense a splitting between their personal inner worlds and the outer world of political, social and global affairs. This is similar to the findings from the clinical strand – therapists and clients – described in Chapter 5.

External affairs were seen to belong out there somewhere, (on the streets, out in the world) and were managed through action. Personal issues and internal struggles, however, could be taken to therapy. Therapy for feelings specifically related to the environmental crisis could be seen as a specialism by some. For instance Pete referred to being interested in ecotherapy and Donna asked whether there were any therapists who specialised in helping people with these sorts of feelings.

I observed the way in which participants' inner worlds were separated from what was happening in the wider outer world. Participants did not make links between their personal histories, experiences and circumstances and their activism. I was particularly struck by this with Carol and Luke.

Carol conducted the interview from her bed. She told me that she suffered pain and fatigue, and there was much she was unable to do as a result, '*just getting through the week is a struggle*'. She was once a very active woman, working as a social worker and involved in many groups. I was aware of both the physical pain of her illness and the emotional pain she felt at the loss of her health, vigour and effectiveness in the world. During the interviews she gave lots of examples of

actions and initiatives she had been involved with. Perhaps she wanted to still be seen as effective and useful. I wondered about the link between this personal experience of severe illness and her involvement in activism. In what way was the physical and emotional pain of her illness connected to the pain she felt about the CEE? There seemed to be a movement between these two registers in her narrative, first telling me that the CEE was the '*great crisis of our time'* but also telling me that *'It's not the biggest problem in my life, right? […] it's not a priority* (*sighs*)'.

Carol's view of therapy for eco-distress was quite dismissive seeing it as pointless or ineffective, saying

> *'the world is awful. That's like just a statement….. Well, if you are a counsellor, what could you say? You know, gosh, yes, I'm sure it does hurt. Yes. It's awful, isn't it? You know, what it's like there's, there's no material there to work with.'*

In other words, what is the point of seeing a therapist? They cannot do anything about the CEE. This may hint at a sense of powerlessness and again, the link with her illness seems worth considering. A therapist could not do anything about that either. Carol went on to say *'my experience of therapists is that they, they tend to shy away from political stuff… there's a sort of almost a deliberate lack of having a political perspective'*. This supports findings from the clinical strand described in Chapter 5 and I wondered whether Carol had had a poor experience of therapy in the past. Perhaps therapists had shied away from the political stuff but also she may be afraid that they will shy away from her illness and her feelings about it as she herself does:

> *'There's just just like, sort of so much loss and grief in my life from a personal point of view that I'm sort of that the aperture the the aperture that I allow myself even to sort of deal with my personal grief um needs to be fairly closed.'*

Perhaps Carol is expressing that sometimes what she is experiencing in both her inner and outer worlds, her illness and the CEE, can be too much to bear together all at once. She seems to fear, and perhaps has experienced, that it would also be too much for any therapist to bear.

Carol had quite a strong social perspective on therapy which may also account for her dismissal of therapy for eco-distress. She preferred a co-counselling model where two people can mutually offer support to each other. She said,,

> *'we shouldn't have to go into therapy, we shouldn't have to have, you know, the experts. And then you know, the professionals and the clients, it's like, this is actually a tool we can all do for each other'.*

Luke also differentiated his inner world from the outer world. He split his anxiety into social anxiety for which he had had some therapy in the past, and the anxiety he felt as an activist which he said did not weigh so heavily on his mind. However, there was some contradiction in his narrative because he also said that being in the activist group caused him anxiety, '*And the kind of like, social mechanics of interacting with people can for me become like, kind of anxiety inducing and quite exhausting'*.

The contradiction could indicate an unconscious defensive splitting dynamic. It may be difficult for Luke to own the socially anxious part of himself (that needs therapy) when he is inhabiting his activist identity. He said that feelings are talked about in a '*flippant and humourous'* way in the activist groups. The culture seems to focus on risk-taking and being willing to make sacrifices for the cause. Doing '*real activism'* for him means taking action that is often illegal and sometimes violent. Luke told me he feels guilty for not doing more and feels jealous if he sees someone else '*doing something amazing'*. At the same time, however, he also questions himself wondering '*am I cut out for this?*'.

Throughout Luke's two interviews, his speech was muddled and difficult to follow at times. I had to work hard to follow him and I wondered whether this was due to the interview situation or whether reflection is difficult and taxing for him in general. Although he tried to split his anxiety into inner and outer, the two could be connected. His social anxiety and the need to belong may make it difficult for him to acknowledge any anxieties he may have about his activism. For instance, he may fear arrest and violence, he may fear lack of financial security which his activist lifestyle causes. In a reciprocal dynamic, the splitting off of these anxieties are necessary for him to engage in the activism, there is no space to feel fear when you are going to war.

This reading of split and potentially disowned anxious and vulnerable parts of activists is supported by my counter-transferential therapeutic feelings towards them. I frequently slipped into a more therapeutic mode for example by validating,

affirming, empathising and suggesting the need for self-care. These more therapeutic responses tended not to be responded to, however. There was little acknowledgment of vulnerability. Listening to participants dismiss and discount therapy as having a role for them as activists was uncomfortable and I wanted to push for more affect. It led me to a more rigid position that they **should** be talking about their feelings. I wanted to say 'but you just haven't found the right therapist yet!' This mirrors and reverses the counter-transferential response to the one I experienced with therapist participants where I felt they should be talking about the CEE with their clients.

Although this is an indication of myself as a defended therapist overshadowing my role as researcher, it also suggests that finding a therapist who understands and could work with activists and their feelings regarding environmental issues, their inner and outer worlds, could be difficult. Findings from therapist interviews discussed in Chapter 5 show that therapists can be defended in a similar way by bracketing out the outer CEE from their work with clients' inner worlds.

Accessing any therapy can be difficult. Talking therapy provision through the NHS or charities is limited and there are often long waiting times. Private therapy is very expensive and the activists in my sample may not have had the economic resources to access this support for themselves. This may be another reason why they felt therapy was not relevant; it was outside of their range of options for managing their feelings.

6.4.2 I don't need it

Another way in which therapy was considered irrelevant was by participants who felt they did not need it. Simon was a good example of this. He presented as someone who was well practiced in managing his feelings by filtering information he pays attention to and by managing his thoughts:

> *'one of the ways that this […] doesn't keep me awake at night is learning how to manage my my own mind. Because if it's kind of unbridled, it just goes wherever it wants to go. And it loves terrifying sensationalism. And so learning how to clock what is the atmosphere that my thoughts are creating inside me and derailing that so that the system can rest so as to be more effective out there, I think that's probably the most powerful tool in the bag because without it, yeah, the mind runs us ragged. […] it seems clear to me that those that haven't got that they are in control of their thoughts would be run ragged in this. It would just be an endless worrying*

> *stream of media statements about, you know, forests and oceans and atmospheres and blah, blah, blah. And, yeah, that's that that's where the therapy will come in, for sure.'*

Simon is saying that others who are not so able to control their thoughts and mind might need therapy but he has found another way. This could be a defensive projection of his anxieties that might otherwise keep him awake at night onto others who might need therapy. He describes most people as '*living in this little positive bubble'* unaware of this information which could '*wake them up to what is going on beyond EastEnders'.* In the first interview he told me, *'I live in a very lovely little bubble, in which we're all very expressive'.* So he could also be disavowing and projecting the part of himself which can be closed off from reality in the positive bubble of his own life.

Simon's positive bubble consists of living in community with others where feelings are expressed regularly through weekly check-ins and prayer circles. His home is located on a beautiful estate with access to woodland, a river and pastures. When he begins to feel distressed he can '*go out for a walk, listen to the birds and remind myself of all that is good in the world'*. He has spent many years travelling and learning from other cultures, particular in the Far East, and has developed what he calls 'tools' for managing times when he experiences troubling thoughts and feelings. Simon's lack of a need for therapy may well be genuine, *'I can't really imagine what somebody else could bring to me that I haven't already grasped, because I am quite a big thinker on these things'.*

I wondered whether he was as accomplished in managing his own mind as he suggested as the phrase 'he doth protest too much' kept coming to mind. When I asked towards the end of the first interview how it had been talking about the CEE, he said it was one of his '*favourite subjects'* and laughed. I was unsure how to read his laughter. He seemed to be enjoying himself in the interview, talking about subjects that interested him and he felt passionate about. Equally, his laughter and positivity could be a manic defence, a way of not feeling his anxieties, or at least reducing the affective impact. Simon became more aware of his defences through the interview process, however, as this extract from the end of the second interview shows:

'Simon - I've become more aware of how I sidestep quite a lot of those feelings in order to, to for this sense of cohesion to be there. Because there is this massive well of grief and fear and all of those things. And I know better than to just be completely washed away in them, though it would be really good to spend some time become familiar with them. And I notice in myself that I probably don't spend as much time with those scary emotions as I would advise. Because they contain

Trudi - Because they're scary?

Simon - (Laughs) I've put a fucking lid on it for a reason and I don't wanna take it back off again […]haven't really just gone in there and swum about in the ocean cuz that's how it feels it's just an endless dark soupy place. So yeah, I'm having a lovely time (laughs).'

There seems to be a dynamic at play between an unconscious projection and disavowal of his anxieties and a more conscious attempt at regulating and containing them.

Participants got something supportive through their activism which they did not feel would be offered or possible through conventional therapy. XR actions are characterised by creativity including street theatre, samba bands and imaginative installations with a hint of irony (such as the pink boat parked in Oxford Circus). Participants involved in XR spoke with fondness of singing with others and dancing, feelings of love and kindness which were around them – '*XR action was such a beautiful thing to experience'* (Donna). For Luke and Natalie, XR was problematic, however. They saw it as non-inclusive and did not always agree with their methods. For them, their activism provided a sense of purpose and meaning and the opportunity to develop intense and intimate relationships with other activists. Natalie uses art within her activism to express her feelings. She calls this 'artivism'. In her paintings she depicts animals looking beautiful, for example wearing flower crowns, and then adds some text explaining how they are '*brutally slaughtered'*. In this way, she told me she feels a catharsis. There is a sublimation of her shock and horror into a productive activity that positively seeks to change perceptions.

Although participants tended not to seek therapy for their concerns about the CEE, they did speak about the emotional cost of being involved in activism. It takes a lot of time and in some cases reduces the participant's capacity to earn money. They risk arrest and a criminal record. There is a risk to their physical safety and to their

mental health. Natalie for instance described an incident which took place on an anti-hunt action where she was physically attacked by the huntsmen. She said

> *'my brain just switches off and I like, can't connect to how stressful it's supposed to be when those things happen. And then we just got back in the landy and ate cake and went home (laughs). And that was like a normal day for us.'*

Natalie seemed to be describing a type of dissociation. She acknowledged that activism has affected her mental health and possibly caused some trauma, even post-traumatic stress:

> *'I relate to like people who have been to war and come back from war, even though it's an entirely different thing. I guess like sometimes, we're having to be so hyper-vigilant and scary things happen that it's like you, it's like now I'm on high alert all the time.'*

We spoke about the risk of burnout, something she acknowledged she had experienced and this is something I return to in Chapter 8. However, it seems that the burden of sacrifice for Natalie and others is outweighed by the sense of belonging, agency and belief in having an impact.

Summary

When analysing the data from activists, I was seeking to answer the following questions:

- What are the processes by which people engage in activism?
- What are people bringing, consciously and unconsciously, to their activism?
- How are feelings relating to the CEE experienced and managed through activism?

My findings show that people engage in activism for reasons in addition to wanting to bring about change. Seeking belonging, identity and hope are also motivating factors and support Jasper's (1998) assertion that developing affective ties with group members is an important motivator and can make activism a pleasurable experience.

Activism appears to act as a catalyst, transforming the base elements of affect into something useful – agency and action. Positive experiences of empowerment,

excitement, making amends, discharge of anger and togetherness can replace the more difficult feelings of powerlessness, guilt, fear and grief which are present both consciously and unconsciously. The cultural norms of different activist group has a strong bearing on whether space exists for feelings to be discussed and shared and in what form this space exists. This is important when considering how best to manage climate emotions and I will discuss this further in Chapter 7.

Inner work and outer action appear to be kept separate for the most part and this supports Lawson's (2021) earlier findings. It also mirrors my findings in the clinical sample of therapists and clients. However, the pattern is reversed; for activists the focus is on outer world issues with little space for inner world concerns. I discuss the implications of this for both activism and therapy in the following chapters.

Chapter 7 – Discussion Part 1

What Happens When We Take Our Eco-Distress Somewhere?

Introduction

In this chapter I will be discussing my findings in relation to the question of what happens when we take our eco-distress, small or large, conscious or unconscious, either into therapy or into activism. I will draw on relevant literature to make sense of the findings and to develop some thoughts regarding the implications for therapy and activism which I outline in the next chapter, Chapter 8.

7.1 Splitting

A notable finding was the way in which the social, in this case the CEE, is kept out of therapy and the personal is kept out of activism. This inverse relationship is interesting. It suggests an either/or choice: the focus is either on our inner world through a therapeutic process, or on our outer world through engaging in activism. We seem to have split practical action from psychological reflection (Rust, 2020) and politics from therapy. This is not a new observation. Hoggett observed that in political movements of which he was a member there was 'little interest in the individual' and, conversely, psychoanalysis seemed 'incapable of discerning the …struggle for life and death within society' (Hoggett, 1992, p.3). Similarly, Samuels (2006) draws attention to the way in which the external sociopolitical world is hardly ever mentioned in psychotherapy clinical texts, even though the founders of psychotherapy such as Freud, Jung, Fritz Perls and Carl Rogers saw themselves as social critics (Samuels, 2001). In Mowat's (2022) small scale study of therapist's thoughts and feelings about the CEE specifically and how it manifested in their work, all her participants remarked that the CEE was not a topic of conversation in staff rooms, supervision or their clinical practice, further corroborating this split.

7.1.1 Splitting in therapy

In therapy, although clients usually present with personal psychological and relational difficulties, my data suggests that eco-distress may also be present, even if not figural. The finding that this is not explored, I argue is partly due to an assemblage of defensive processes – those of the individual client and therapist, those within the co-constructed relationship of the therapeutic dyad and those

operating at the social level of the therapy profession and wider society. As previously discussed in Chapter 5, various splitting processes were apparent: the CEE was treated as separate and distinct from nature as a healing resource; relationships with humans were typically depicted as problematic compared to relationships with the more-than-human world which were presented as easy; nature was characterised as benevolent whereas nature as dangerous and threatening was kept out of the narratives; clients' presenting issues were seen as separate from their relationship with the natural world.

These splitting processes serve to keep our problematic abusive and destructive behaviour towards the natural world, and the threat the CEE poses out of conscious awareness. Instead, the natural world is idealised, even fetishised. Through an attachment paradigm Mother Earth is framed as nurturing and munificent, compensating for human failings. When client participants described key moments of crisis during which they had turned to the natural world, I myself drew on this narrative. I framed the role that the natural world was playing in attachment terms and offered interpretations back to participants using words such as 'holding', 'witnessing', 'safe place' and 'special relationship'. Participants seemed to find this helpful and as a therapist this framing came naturally to me as it did to my therapist participants. What we risk in doing this splitting off is our collective culpability, our dependency on the natural world and our consequential vulnerability and fear of annihilation. We fail to see our relationship with nature as a 'with-holding, threatening and abandoning parent struggling with a spiteful, jealous and destructive child' (Randall, 2005, p.174).

The idealisation of the natural world observed in the narratives of my participants is typical of The Pastoral as described by Williams (1973); nature is seen as a place of innocence, tranquillity, peace and simple virtue. Williams suggests that this idealisation is counter to the threat of loss that accompanies times of war, crisis and political chaos, saying 'it is in direct reaction to the internal corruption of the city: the rise of lawyer, merchant, general, pimp and procurer; the stink of place and profit' (Williams, 1973, p.47). We are in such times today. The CEE presents us with a global crisis of huge proportions and complexity so perhaps not surprising that participants idealised the natural world in this way. However, by adding a psychoanalytic lens to Williams's assertion, I would argue that this idealisation is not

just a defence against the reality of external sociopolitical conditions, but also a defence against our own internal corruption. The lawyer, merchant, general and pimp are within us all as internalised but split-off elements.

Williams selects a quote from Alexander Pope to illustrate the way in which idealisation of nature hides a less positive truth:

> *'We must therefore use some illusion to render a pastoral delightful; and this consists in exposing the best side of a shepherd's life, and concealing its miseries' (Williams, 1973, p.19)*

The use of the word 'illusion' hints towards a sleight of hand and leads us towards a psychoanalytic understanding of idealisation as an unconscious defence. Hinshelwood (2013) describes idealisation as the belief that good is 'emphasized in order to obliterate awareness of dangerous things' (Hinshelwood, 2013, p.167). The common narrative of an idealised and nurturing nature is a seductive one which conforms to Benjamin's idea of 'collective curative fantasies' (Benjamin, 2012, p.51) a way in which we can redeem ourselves from our culpability and guilt. In other words, the idealisation of nature obliterates our awareness of our own internal corruption.

My data indicates that we have a deep attachment relationship with the more-than-human world. The possibility of losing our dearest love object is profoundly distressing and the added guilt that we may be the cause can be too much to bear. Similarly, the reality that the result of our actions is a 'mother' that then wreaks punishment in the form of floods, hurricanes, droughts and fires is a terror, again, too much to bear. Splitting helps to keep the bad (abandoned self, destructive self, vengeful mother) split off from the good. It makes reality bearable but can also mean reality is not faced.

7.1.2 Splitting in activism

In the world of activism, Lawson (2021) similarly points to the split between action and reflection noting that activists resist looking at their inner world because they believe it has no bearing on what is going on in the outer world. Urgency is another reason for the lack of reflection and Lawson quotes an observation from an organisational development expert 'people who run campaigns aren't people who stop and reflect. It's all go go go, thinking at 100 miles an hour. […] Reflection is really very rare' (Lawson, 2021, p.16). This certainly resonates with my findings

amongst the activists I interviewed. Participants did not readily make links between their personal histories and experiences and their activism. The lack of engagement with my more therapeutic responses in the interviews and a general dismissing of the therapy for helping them manage feelings regarding the CEE, suggests that action may be privileged over feelings, even though feelings may be driving action. This could be a very helpful defence. It means activists can channel their feelings towards potentially useful action without the risk of being flooded by immobilising feelings. This is what Jasper refers to when discussing how moral shock can either paralyse or mobilise people towards activism. He says 'Inchoate anxieties and fears must be transformed into moral indignation and outrage' (Jasper 1998, p.409) and quotes Hochschild (1975, p.298), 'social movements for change make 'bad' feelings okay, and they make them useful'.

In a similar vein, Bion (1961) made the point that the function of a work-group can be 'assisted' (Bion, 1961, p.146) by a defensive basic-assumption mentality. For example, a powerful fight-flight basic-assumption mentality could be very useful for an activist group at a particular moment in time when they are engaging in dangerous action against the perceived common enemy. For instance, Natalie said,

> *'if things got really stressful I do just dissociate which kind of helps me because I go into like a really practical mode where I'm like, like the emotional side shuts down and I'm just like we need to do this, this and this'*

However, there could also be situations where the defence is less helpful and instead activists are working at the task at the expense of their own wellbeing and perhaps losing sight of the much larger picture – a kind of 'activity, but without reflexivity' (French and Simpson, 2010, p.1868). This could be relevant for Luke and Natalie.

A lack of reflection by activists could serve to push their own shadow, their potential for violence, abuse and self-serving behaviours, out of awareness (Lawson, 2021). I found Carol quite strident and, based on my countertransference, could imagine her being judgemental and perhaps even intolerant of others' views. Yet she worked hard to get the marginalised voices of disabled people heard within the XR movement. If these tendencies towards being judgemental and intolerant were present within Carol to any extent, then without being aware of them she could risk alienating others and not be as effective at creating the change she wants.

Luke's activism meets his need to belong as well as being something he believes in. His need to belong drives him to take bigger risks ('*doing something amazing'*) than he sometimes feels comfortable with ('*am I cut out for this?*') but seems split off and out of awareness. As I previously described he became more aware of it through the interviewing process and then felt uncomfortable, perhaps even embarrassed, that his motives for activism were not purely political but also to do with his personal emotional needs. Lawson (2021) draws attention to the idea of the 'wounded activist' (p. 172) which may be helpful in understanding Luke's attraction to his activist group. I pick this up again later in section 7.2.2 'Rules of activism'. Being aware of and understanding how split off parts of us drive our action is important for efficacy and wellbeing, something I return to in the next chapter.

Splitting was also seen to operate at the group level amongst the activist participants. Luke and Natalie operated within an 'us and them' dynamic with strong feelings, even hatred, towards landowners and huntsmen and women – *'grotesque and viscerally reprehensible kind of function of private property'* (Luke). Such demonisation is the polar opposite of idealisation. Luke and Natalie saw themselves as the good guys, fighting for a just cause *('a moral call to arms'* – Luke) and anyone involved in hunting or badger culling as the enemy. Splitting like this makes things easier as it gives an illusory clarity (Keene, 2013, p. 148) which may be helpful during an intense action. Reality is much more messy. The debate around blood sports and the management of the countryside includes elements of history, culture, economics and farming practices. Reflecting on these complexities and multiple viewpoints may not be easy or helpful for activists.

The 'us and them' dynamic was also apparent in Luke and Natalies's comments regarding the XR movement. Although they both agreed that the CEE was terrible and cared very much about the loss of species, they were critical of XR's methods seeing them as ineffective. This under-valuing is akin to Freud's concept of the narcissism of minor differences (Freud, 1918). The dynamic was also apparent in Simon's view of people who he sees as uninformed about the reality of the CEE and who need to wake up '*to what is going on beyond EastEnders'.* Simon is discursively separating himself from these other people and positioning himself as informed, awake and making the right decisions. He is demonstrating what Lawson has described as 'over-there thinking' (Lawson, 2021, p.14). He seems to split off

and project his own tendency for escapism from the reality of the CEE in his *'very lovely little bubble, in which we're all very expressive'.* It is unclear whether he lacks sympathy for those who need to look away, perhaps due to their limited resources, but this could add support to Lawson's (2021) findings that activists can reproduce the systems they are seeking to change.

7.1.3 Splitting as disavowal

When the defence of splitting occurred it allowed participants to know about the CEE without being disturbed by it, a form of disavowal, a simultaneous knowing and not knowing (Hoggett, 2022) as expressed by therapist Jenny – '*the fact that clients, like many of us do just live a little bit in this kind of alternative reality that it's not climate crisis'.* Therapist Sarah may be splitting off her curiosity when she becomes uninterested in the news or '*fearful facts'*. Activist Bob could be splitting off his culpability by diffusing responsibility (Hoggett, 2022) when he says,

> *'think of what's going on in places like China or something where they're building God knows how many new coal powered coal fired power stations every week. Yeah. What's the point?'*

Client Martin may be splitting off his feelings about the CEE by taking an objective, detached, 'scientist' position and client Sean's faith in a '*greater intelligence'* may be a way of splitting off his fear and engaging in wishful thinking masquerading as hope (Hoggett, 2022) when he says,

> *'I'm a believer of this unfailing love that holds and sustains and has created all…So even as horrible as a situation might be as we perceive ourselves and know and we think there's no way out, I I always believe that there is um and it's a sense of a a much greater intelligence that we don't understand… that's where my hope comes from'*

For many of us just getting on with things, described by Hoggett (2022, p.23) as 'unreflective accommodation', is another form of disavowal. When therapist and client participants spoke about therapy focussing on personal and domestic problems rather than sociopolitical issues, this could be what they are describing. They know about the urgent situation threatening human and more-than-human life, but instead to 'turn to the pressing concerns of their daily life' (Hoexter, 2016, p.23). As well as a psychological defence, I also see this as reflective of the dominant Modern neoliberal culture of individualism, where the self-project of constantly constructing

the self through relationships, physical attributes and material assets (Giddens, 1991) is given centre stage. I will discuss this further in the next section, 7.2, 'The rules of engagement'.

However, splitting inner and outer concerns can be a helpful strategy. It appears to be useful for creating spaces of refuge. Inner reflection can be a retreat from a sometimes overwhelming social world and, conversely, a sociopolitical focus can offer a retreat from inner distress. For instance, activist Steven told me he goes into himself as a way of retreating from all the '*stats about loss of land and flooding'*. Carol's activism has been a way of life for her and shapes her identity - '*this is who I am'* – but it also may provide her with a refuge from any loneliness and isolation she may now feel in her life due to her illness, '*the aperture that I allow myself even to sort of deal with my personal grief um needs to be fairly closed'*. Focussing on her emotional pain for the earth and channelling this into action may distract her from her illness and the possible powerlessness she feels about it. Luke's anarchist politics are a factor in his activism but he also seems to have found refuge from his sense of isolation through joining an activist group, *'it felt like I'd sort of finally found the like, the weird, subterranean kind of lentil eating weirdos who which I've felt that I've should've been a part of all along'*. For Natalie activism may have provided her with a way of expressing parts of herself that she could not express in her family, *'I quite quickly learned to be almost two different people'.* However, if the activist is unaware of how their own emotional needs are interconnected with their activism then there is more chance of burnout and other unintended consequences such as loss of physical health, relationships, income and even liberty. Such an awareness requires some personal reflection and this needs to occur in a safe space. If, where, when and how such a safe space is created will be determined by the cultural norms of the activist group.

7.2 The rules of engagement

What we notice, pay attention to and speak about in different contexts is socially constructed through rules (Zerubavel, 2006). These rules are internalised and tell us what is irrelevant or even taboo. They teach us how to behave tactfully and politely within our social communities. We develop collective patterns of thinking as 'thought communities' (Norgaard, 2011, p.6). We socially ignore certain topics in order to avoid feeling pain, fear or shame and hence these rules provide social

defences against anxiety (Menzies-Lyth, 1960). The social fields of both therapy and activism each constitute 'thought communities' and have such rules. In this section I will discuss this further in relation to my findings.

7.2.1 The rules of therapy.

Dominant Western psychology has tended to privilege the individual over social and political contexts, driving our understanding of what therapy is for, a stance criticised by community psychology and feminist theory (Kałwak and Weihgold, 2022). References to political or social material has historically been interpreted in psychotherapy as a symptom; a displacement of some intrapersonal problem or a defence against processing inner pain (Hoggett, 1992). However, a psychosocial perspective reverses this logic and instead would see it as 'a symptom when the patient does not talk about politics' (Saba, 2022, p.346). Farrar and Hanley (2023) highlight that therapists are anxious and conflicted when discussing sociopolitical issues with clients and this can affect the therapeutic alliance.

My findings support this critique. The surprise expressed by participants, both clients and therapists, regarding exploring concerns about the CEE, suggested they had not considered this as an option; it was not part of the socially constructed rules for a therapy conversation. Norgaard (2011) underlines the power in this kind of cultural denial – 'cultural denial is so effective precisely *because* it is invisible and thus feels "natural"' (2011, p.133, emphasis in the original). There was little space for the social and political in their work and therapists concerned themselves predominantly with the clients' presenting issues, taking an individualistic approach to the work, and this felt natural for both client and therapist.

Several client participants told me that although they did not speak about feelings concerning the more-than-human world or the CEE explicitly in their therapy sessions, they had mentioned things such as their pets (Sean), their love of trees (Elaine) and their connection with the river (Helen). Mentioning the weather was also commonly reported. These seemingly peripheral comments were not opened up for further exploration. Therapists seemed to see these comments as small talk, part of the arriving in the space and the British culture of talking about the weather. However, as Timothy Morton points out, 'You can no longer have a routine conversation about the weather with a stranger. The presence of global warming

looms into the conversation like a shadow' (Morton, 2013, p.99) and it is 'frequently loaded with greater significance' (Seaman, 2016, p.88).

The particular context of the COVID-19 pandemic provided ample opportunity for such small talk regarding what was happening in the wider world outside of the consulting room. The pandemic brought home the 'unsentimental aspect of nature' (Hollway et al., 2022) and the ever-present reality of death. However, even then, client comments relating to the positive impact on nature and the environment, and their increased engagement with the natural world as a result of the pandemic, were not explored very deeply. The virus causing the pandemic was seen as separate from nature and the CEE specifically. The natural world was instead idealised as a salve to ease the inconvenience of dealing with the virus through lockdown measures.

Treating these side-mentions as small talk may be interpreted by the client that the therapist is not interested and/or does not want to hear more, as suggested by client participants apologising to me when they had talked about their feelings during the interviews. It was expressed directly by client participant Margaret – *'it's possibly the idea that they* [the therapist] *won't listen. I know counsellors are there to listen, but sometimes they don't*'. Her experience that therapists '*won't listen'* suggests an active if unconscious decision on the part of the therapist to side-step what Margaret wanted to talk about. This side-stepping further reproduces the socially constructed rules of therapy.

The tendency of the therapists to not pick up on such side-mentions can be a premature stepping way from reflecting on the significance of the client's comment and acts a defence, another form of disavowal that enables the therapist from being opened up themselves to distressing feelings. Therapist Sarah's disavowal is evident in this extract when she spoke about a client who is terrified about what is happening in the world:

> *'I know that there's um a part of us that she [the client] is trying to wake up, which is, you know, don't be fools, don't buy into things, don't trust, don't take things as if we're all safe […] I don't want to live my life like that every day […] I'm not saying it doesn't bother me um but I don't want it to bother me to the point where it starts to take away from my enjoyment of life.'*

The defence also operates between therapist and client, a collusion, a shared implicit (unconscious) agreement to not talk about it. Totton (2016) suggests that both client and therapist find concerns about the CEE overwhelming and so it is

> *'all too easy [for the therapist] to give out subtle cues to clients that the issue is unwelcome, especially since a large part of them doesn't want to talk about it anyway' (Totton, 2016, p.16)*

If we consider the therapeutic dyad as a very small group, then Bion's theory of group dynamics may also shed light on what may be happening (Bion, 1961). The dyad may be immersed in a basic-assumption mentality but *feel* that it is working purposefully. However, it could be a pseudo-vitality (French and Simpson, 2010, p.1868) motivated by a desire to avoid the pain of reality – 'adherence to the [basic-assumption mentality] will not demand any painful sacrifices and will therefore be popular' (Bion, 1961, p.128). For instance, my findings regarding the client's protectiveness towards their therapist suggests that the dyad could operate in an unconscious dependency basic-assumption mentality where the therapist acts as the idealised leader for the client. In such a situation, both client and therapist feel as though they are working well on the task, they are focussing on the client's personal relationships and so on. However, the unacknowledged task of facing the barely expressed distress associated with the CEE is avoided.

This defensive approach needs to also be considered in the context of the social. Therapists' adherence to the client's presenting issue, the agreed therapeutic contract, and effectively closing the door on exploring sociopolitical concerns such as the CEE (remember Jenny was *'listening out for what that person is really wanting to bring in that session'*) was positioned as ethical practice by my participants, which of course it is. The importance of not bringing their own agenda into the therapy or of leading the clients in a particular direction was emphasised ('*I'm not that sort of therapist'* – Lee). Therapy should not be an opportunity for the therapist to push their own agenda, however, this can *also* serve as a social defence against anxiety (Menzies Lyth, 1960). It avoids opening up difficult and/or painful feelings for the therapist regarding the CEE. Although a client's presenting problem is a starting point for discussion, therapy could, and arguably should, involve a much broader exploration of the client's life, hopes and fears, particularly as often clients are not aware of what may be troubling them at the outset. However, both client and

therapist normatively align around a set of goals or outcomes for the therapy that tend to focus on personal issues: a professional construct set in place during therapist training and maintained through professional guidelines of ethical practice and reinforced during clinical supervision.

According to modality, therapists are trained to notice material concerned with childhood experiences, cognitive patterns, relationship with the self and relationships with significant others. The training texts listed on reading lists reinforce what is legitimate material for exploration within therapy, how that material should be worked with and in what ways boundaries should be held. Again, although this is important for client and therapist safety, it can also be seen as a social defence. The constraints inherent in the modality facilitate an avoidance of difficult areas, a point highlighted by Mowat's participants (Mowat, 2022). Furthermore, within the therapy encounter, there is a dynamic between therapist and client, a mutual symbiosis or symmetry. The social rules of the therapist might say 'stay with the contract, focus on the client's personal inner world' and the social rules of the client might say 'don't talk about climate change, don't be a party pooper or a Debbie downer', one rule complements and supports the other. As psychotherapist Nick Totton says,

> *'talking about climate change and ecological crisis in an average social situation is equivalent to emitting a loud smelly fart' (Totton, 2016, p.15)*

So the client does not speak about the CEE directly and the therapist remains incurious should the client mention something related to it in passing. Client and therapist may even make small talk about the unusual weather or a current news item, a kind of noise designed to distract from the topic to be avoided. There is an unconscious collusion, a dynamic of co-denial and mutual avoidance, a powerful double-wall of silence (Zerubavel, 2006) which prevents full awareness of the CEE and protects the dyad from painful feelings. The general view about what therapy is for, that is, the micro-level issues of self and relationships with other humans, is agreed upon through parallel processes of collusion established and maintained, both explicitly and implicitly, in strongly held professional and societal frameworks.

My findings have parallels with the findings of Hoggett and Randall (2018) that compared the emotional responses of climate scientists and environmental activists to the CEE. Like the climate scientists in their study who see their role as neutral and

objective, therapists may be using similar social defences against anxiety maintained by ethical guidelines such as remaining neutral, objective, non-judgemental and adhering to their specialism. However, it can be argued that remaining neutral in the face of inaction from governments on the CEE, continued environmental destruction by global corporations and climate injustice is itself unethical. With this in mind the British Psychological Society has updated its Code of Ethics and now reminds members of their 'collective duty for the welfare of human and nonhuman beings, both within the societies in which psychologists live and work, and beyond' (Knight, 2020, p.42).

7.2.2 Rules of activism

For activists, a similar social construction of what is noticed and talked about will also exists and this appears to differ depending on the activist group in question. Significant differences were apparent in the narratives of activist participants regarding how they spoke about emotions and psychological difficulties. Specifically, there was a difference, between the two participants who were hunt saboteurs (Luke and Natalie) and the participants who were members of XR (Carol, Bob, Simon, Donna, Steven and Pete). To recap, Luke and Natalie were much younger, aged 28 and 30 respectively, compared with the remainder of the sample whose mean age was 64 and this age difference may account for some of the differences observed (Carnegie, 2022). My own internal responses during the interviews and when working with the data were also different. I felt less comfortable and more on edge with Luke and Natalie than with the other activists and at the same time I felt more drawn into a therapeutic position, being concerned with their welfare and sensing a fragility underneath their aggressive form of activism.

Hunt saboteurs employ an approach that has been described as a 'block and disrupt' approach favouring 'uncivil lawbreaking, that is, political illegality that is covert, legally evasive, and potentially violent' (Scheuerman, 2022, p.793). Luke and Natalie's descriptions of their activism included allusions to war ('*it's a bit of a kind of military'* – Luke; *'I relate to like people who have been to war'* – Natalie) which chimes with Scheuerman's categorisation. Their descriptions also seemed to indicate a culture where feelings and emotions are not readily talked about. Natalie said,

> *'people don't talk about or don't recognise that it has an impact on their lives… everyone just puts on a brave face and like this is just what we do.'*

If they are talked about they are done in a particular way ('*flippant and humourous'* – Luke; '*general conversations about politics'* - Natalie).

Bion refers to the way in which groups who are unconsciously working from a fight/flight basic-assumption mentality have a 'hatred of all psychological difficulty' (Bion, 1961, p.153) and evade help. When involved with their activist group Luke and Natalie appear to operate in this basic-assumption mentality. Natalie said, '*I stayed in, I'd say, like a state of fight or flight a lot of the time'* and Luke said *"It's like, red lights flashing in my head I guess'*. Their affinity for this is something I consider later in this section. It is also important to consider that their lack of therapeutic interaction with me may also be because the task they agreed to was a research interview where I would explore their relationship with the natural world (see Appendix 2c). Hence, there was no agreement or expectation that we would explore personal material more deeply. However, the remaining activists in the sample were more open to discussing their feelings as described later in this section, so perhaps Luke and Natalie's reticence could be something to do with their affinity for this kind of group culture.

Luke said that he had found the interviews more emotional than expected and this extract which I previously shared in Chapter 6, section 6.2.2 is illuminating:

> *'Trudi - Sounds like a mixture of feeling inspired, but also wanting to belong as well. Two things.*
>
> *Luke - Yeah. Yeah. And I'm kind of almost hesitant to use, I feel like I'm sort of admitting that, whereas like I would like to say more than I got there like myself, but*
>
> *Trudi - it's actually really, what you're saying chimes with, what a lot of people I've spoken to say, that actually that the social aspect of activism is a really strong driver for people. That sense of belonging and shared purpose is really, really powerful and important.*
>
> *Luke - Yeah, I've read a few like stories of like, you hear those like absolutely disgusting stories of undercover policeman getting involved in environmental activism circles'*

He seems uncomfortable (‘*hesitant’*), perhaps even ashamed, ‘*admitting’* that his emotional need for belonging was a motivator for becoming involved in activism. My therapist identity was activated at this point as I offered a therapeutic response. I found myself trying to normalise his experience, letting him know that other activists feel the same way to lessen any feelings of shame. I was validating his need for belonging. His subsequent free association to the ‘*absolutely disgusting stories of undercover policemen’* could be interpreted as both an evasion of my support (flight) and a projection of shame that he may feel for joining the group under ‘false pretences’, that is for needing a place of belonging rather than **solely** for his political beliefs onto the police (fight).

Later in the interview Luke told me he had had therapy in the past because he ‘*hadn't been having good emotional connections to a group or to persons*’ but therapy had not helped. Instead he needed to ‘*just dive in’*. It was not clear why therapy was not helpful but it seems that Luke got what he needed from finding his tribe rather than talking to a therapist.

What is talked about is the level of danger and risk involved in actions and this is done by the group in a competitive way – who has caused the most damage, been imprisoned for longest, experienced the most violence. For instance, Luke said,

> *‘if I see someone, especially if I like know them whose like, done something really amazing, I like yeah, I feel jealous of them…. We're wanting to change something and also wanting to be the person who changes things. Like, that's a whole pathological issue’*

This supports Randall’s (2005) suggestion that one route eco-activists may take as a defence against society’s projected guilt and shame is that of an eco-warrior. This may be particularly relevant for Luke. His self-deprecating reference to being a ‘*lentil-eating weirdo’* could be an attempt at humour but may also hint towards some shame at not fitting in to mainstream society. The eco-activist stereotype of a ‘bearded killjoy’ (Randall, 2005, p.175) which he may receive from people who support hunting could further this shame. By engaging in warrior-like action he turns this into a badge of honour and this acts as a defence against the shame.

Additionally, there is an expectation that in order to be part of the group, one hundred percent commitment is required, it is all or nothing. Both Luke and Natalie’s

lives are dominated by their activism and they make sacrifices in terms of income, time and health, both physical and mental:

> *'I think I just continue to go at full throttle until I get unwell, and then I'm unwell for a while and then I go back to being at full throttle and they struggle to find the balance. So I probably am quite good at burning out in the sense my body just eventually can't hack it and falls ill to something. (Natalie)*

> *'the concept of struggle, I guess is like, becomes like, more of a feature of your day to day […] I guess it's work' (Luke)*

Luke's competition for prestige and Natalie's engagement to the point of illness, correlates with Lawson's description of activists (Lawson, 2021). Natalie told me she had a breakdown following a bout of 'bad pneumonia' because she had done 'too many things' and had to go to bed for a week. This level of commitment is clearly unsustainable for her. A later comment from her that she is trying '*to not feel guilty when I do say no to things and can't do them anymore*' suggests she may have taken the route of internalising society's projected collective guilt (Randall, 2005) and does more and more until she collapses because she does not have 'bottomless resources' (Lawson, 2021, p.73). Natalie was brought up in a fundamentalist Christian community with '*strong ethics around me and morals'* and *'would prefer to sacrifice my own things to make to leave the world a better place than just like enjoying my time all the time'.* This may also be a factor in her level of commitment and feelings of guilt regarding her activism. Again, as with Luke, I found myself slipping into a therapist position when I became concerned for her wellbeing and clumsily tried to draw attention to her need for self-care:

> *'Trudi - And kind of thinking about that, you know, that you'd got yourself to a more stable state, and feeling better and then and then sort of your activism has kind of created this much more fight or flight constant background feeling. And I guess, I'm wondering, that feels like quite a high cost to pay for you. And how do you how you, how do you feel about that?*
>
> *Natalie - I think it's kind of everyone just puts on a brave face and like this is just what we do. But actually, we don't recognise that it does have a quite a big toll on different people over time.*
>
> *Trudi - Yeah. I think activist burnout is really very kind of well recognised as a as something that happens.*
>
> *Natalie - Yeah, yeah. That's true.'*

The unspoken social rules for the hunt saboteurs seem to include risk-taking, self-sacrifice and total commitment to the group. Luke and Natalie's attraction towards hunt sabotage, together with my counter-transferential response of being therapeutic, makes me think that there could be something traumatic in their past to explain their engagement with and affinity for the more violent form of activism, they could be 'wounded activist[s]' (Lawson, 2021, p.172). This emphasises the way in which social and cultural defences interact with individual psyches to determine particular patterns of expression in the lived experience (Rust, 2020; Randall, 2005).

Luke and Natalie's relationship to the group is contrasted with the XR activists who advocated nonviolent civil disobedience (NVCD) characterised by 'strict civility, conscientiousness, nonviolence, publicity, and respect for the law' (Scheuerman, 2022, p.793). For XR activists there was less rigidity. Participants had been more or less involved with XR at different times and moved flexibly in and out of the group as their needs changed. This could be a more sustainable relationship to the group that avoids burnout. This approach is considered to have a wider public appeal and this was confirmed by several participants who only felt able to get involved in activism precisely because XR advocated NVCD. For example Bob said,

> *'I suddenly realised there's lots of people, not the usual people, older people, not the crazy gang, who are willing and motivated enough to get out there on the streets […] I was very impressed by that and thought why can't I join that gang? And so I joined.'*

In naming '*the crazy gang'* Bob is drawing a line between himself and other types of activists. I imagined that he might see Luke and Natalie as part of the crazy gang because of their willingness to destroy property and their anti-police stance.

Participants who were members of XR were more open to acknowledging their psychological difficulties even though traditional individual therapy was not seen as useful for supporting them with their feelings regarding the CEE. Instead other approaches for obtaining emotional support were sought. For example, Carol engaged in co-counselling, a form of peer support, Donna frequently met in women's circles, Simon was involved in prayer circles and Steven was part of a spiritual group. They also seemed more emotionally self-aware. Steven described feeling 'helpless'; 'frustrated'; 'denial'; 'urgency'; 'vulnerable'; 'lonely' and knowing that he could also be 'disrespectful to nature'. This showed a sophisticated level of

emotional awareness and an openness to share his feelings. Carol acknowledged her defences, saying that she has to disconnect from her feelings about the CEE and keep it in the background, she is aware '*not letting the pain in too much*'. So although XR participants also tended not to see therapy as helpful or relevant for supporting them with feelings associated with the CEE, the manner and tone of the rejection was different to that of the hunt saboteurs. This may have been due to the age difference between the two groups rather than the social rules of the group, however. As already mentioned, Luke and Natalie were much younger than the XR group.

Another possible rule worth drawing attention to is the way in which different activist groups talk about each other. I have already mentioned Bob's reference to '*the crazy gang'* above and in a similar way, as previously discussed, Luke and Natalie had concerns about XR. A disparaging of NVCD by 'block and disrupt' activists has been noted by Scheuerman (2022) and may also be part of the rules of engagement for Luke and Natalie. Luke sees his activism as having a direct here and now result – '*the act of doing it is also like the result'*. Luke is alluding to a view that NVCD is too slow and takes too long to get results, whereas sabotage actually stops something unwanted from happening immediately, in his case a fox's life is saved, or an arms factory is damaged. Luke also felt some of the XR protests had consequences for people who were already disadvantaged, workers who already had '*a hundred and one things to worry about*'. Natalie shared a similar concern about the demographics of XR as a movement in relation to race:

> *'And I know that they sent like a thank you card to a police station or some some sort of gesture, might have been like flowers and a card or something like that, I can't remember the details anymore but it was a to a police station in Bristol, where I'm pretty sure a person of colour had just actually recently died in custody there and, and obviously doing the sort of work I do I'm quite anti-police really.'*

As I have already suggested, Luke and Natalie's criticisms of XR could be interpreted as the narcissism of minor differences (Freud, 1918). However, their criticism is shared more widely and can be argued to have validity (Fiennes, 2019; Gayle, 2019). The climate movement must engage with issues of class and race. I also wondered whether Luke and Natalie were projecting guilt about their own privilege onto XR activists as both had commented during their interviews that they were aware of their white, middle-class privilege. For example, Natalie said '*I'm*

highly aware that I'm also another like, white middle class person that I have a lot of privileges. And I don't really want to be like another white middle class person going like, hey, look at all this cool stuff I'm doing all the time'

In the previous quote, Natalie is also expressing a key aspect of the block and disrupt approach to activism which is anti-police and this is in contrast with XR's approach of working with the police via police liaison. Stephen's experience of engaging with and feeling understood by the law – *'I felt got by the magistrate'* – as a means of making change and garnering public opinion highlights the difference particularly clearly.

Although Luke and Natalie were not part of XR, it is worth noting that there are factions within XR who would more likely align with a block and disrupt approach. In mentioning this I am suggesting that there will be sub-groups within any activist movement that may well have their own rules of engagement.

Another rule within activism seems to be that the personal cost of activism is rarely talked about. I recall a particular XR meeting prior to a large, planned action when members who had been arrested during past actions were invited to stand. These individuals were applauded and the more times they had been arrested the more they were lauded. What remained unspoken was that many of them had lost their jobs and livelihood as a result of being arrested, and some had found the experience frightening and traumatic. This was not drawn attention to. Perhaps to do so could instil fear and threaten the cohesiveness of the group. Natalie told me,

> *'I find that it's just like a few of us who don't particularly earn very much and are like putting so much time aside to like do extra projects. And yeah, there's obviously no no financial reward for any of that and no pay'*

In a similar vein, Luke said,

> *'there's also like a lot of like, severe implications. It's like a really strange like, because you feel like you're like you're, you're doing, like real activism. And then you're yeah, and then you're kind of like punished for it'*

Lawson argues that this internalised culture of activism serves to perpetuate systems of oppression and abuse, the very systems that activists are often engaged in trying to change (Lawson, 2021).

The findings suggest that the specific culture of the group is a powerful factor in how feelings and emotions are expressed and managed and correlates with Hoggett and Randall's (2018) study of activists.

7.3 Working with feelings and defences

In this section I further discuss the findings of how the range of feelings of eco-distress are processed and managed in the context of therapy and activism. As I have described in Chapter 5 in therapy the distress often presents as side-mentions rather than directly. Therapists and clients can be defended in various ways such that the side-mentions do not get further explored. For activist participants, there was a mixture of willingness to engage with emotions as discussed above in the section 'Rules of engagement'. In Chapter 6 I outlined the way in which feelings can be transformed through the engagement in activism. To further the discussion of these findings I will draw on Winnicott's concept of transitional space and play, and Benjamin's concept of the therapeutic third.

7.3.1 Transitional space and the therapeutic third

The concept of transitional space is one which underpins much of psychotherapeutic practice. It derives from Winnicott's work as a child psychoanalyst and his subsequent theory that in early infancy we learn the difference between what is me and not-me through the use of objects, transitional objects, that are both of me and not-me (Winnicott, 1971). Typical examples are pieces of cloth, dummies or soft toys. This affords the developing infant an area of experiencing, a transitional space, to which both their inner life of impulses and affect, and the external world of reality contribute. It is also a space where play occurs. Winnicott saw play as neither belonging to the inside, the me, nor the outside, the not-me, but belonging in the transitional, imaginary and creative transitional space. He saw playing as important for healthy growth as it allows for the accommodation to reality, which can sometimes be difficult or painful. For the infant, playing with a reliable carer that is attuned to their emotional needs allows them to tolerate the anxiety experienced as they attempt to control their external world. In adult life this is then transformed into the capacity for social and cultural life (Winnicott, 1971).

7.3.1.1 In the context of therapy

If we apply this to therapy of adults, Winnicott describes therapy as taking place 'in the overlap of two areas of playing, that of the patient and that of the therapist. Psychotherapy has to do with two people playing together' (Winnicott, 1971, p.38). So therapy can be seen as a very sophisticated form of play, where both therapist and client are absorbed in a transitional space of creatively making sense of something. Similar to the infant scenario, this needs to occur in a reliable relationship where the therapist is trusted by the client to be consistently able to attune to their emotional needs and contain any unbearable affect that may be experienced.

For Benjamin (2004) this transitional space, this overlap of play between the client and therapist, creates a particular experience which she describes as thirdness, defined as an intersubjective relating 'a relationship of mutual recognition—a relation in which each person experiences the other as a "like subject," another mind who can be "felt with," yet has a distinct, separate center [sic] of feeling and perception' (Benjamin, 2004, p.5). She views thirdness as a process of 'letting go into being with [the other]' (Benjamin, 2004, p.7). When this process of thirdness occurs, a shared vantage point is co-created by the therapist and client that is outside of each individual within the dyad. However, this is not an easy process to facilitate and Benjamin contrasts thirdness with 'twoness' where the relational dynamic is one of complementarity, each person choosing between submitting or resisting to the other's perspective, a 'doer and done to' dynamic (Benjamin, 2004). We can see that twoness lacks the potential for the creativity and playful exploration inherent in thirdness that leads to insight, new understandings and change.

Benjamin applies this concept in even more intricate detail in a later paper (Benjamin, 2009) by considering the way in which part-selves come into relationship in therapy, a part-self of the client meeting a part-self of the therapist. If the part-self being expressed by the client is not recognised and related to by an appropriate part-self of the therapist in such a way that they can engage in thirdness relating, then the transitional space is unavailable. Impasse and/or rupture ensues. This can all be out of awareness for both client and therapist and need not necessarily be experienced as conflict. On the contrary, on the surface it can appear harmonious, a kind of pseudo-mutuality. What is apparent is that the therapy does not appear to be progressing, it becomes stuck. So how does this apply to my findings?

Let us consider that when a client is making a side-comment relating in some way to the CEE, they are expressing their eco-political part-self, the self that is concerned with what is happening to the planet and its inhabitants, human and nonhuman alike. Here I am developing Samuels' proposition of the existence of a political self (Samuels, 2006) to also incorporate the specific concerns regarding the more-than-human world and the CEE. Samuels suggests that the political self develops over time as a result of socioeconomic, cultural and familial factors. Likewise, our relationship with the natural more-than-human world is shaped by these factors. All the client participants spoke about childhood memories of playing freely in the natural world. Several of them spoke about key family members that were associated with these experiences:

> *'I'd walk the dog from quite an early age with my dad and feel that that was a very connecting activity for us (Helen)*
>
> *My dad always built boats […] we used to go up and down on the river. (Elaine)*
>
> *And if I close my eyes, I can even see those crashing waves, I can see my dad there. And it's, (pause) I think that's got a connection for me as well too […] I love sea swimming, I love everything about the beach […]and I think that comes from how I, you know, sort of felt by being at the beach when I was younger.' (Sean)*

Sean's love of the beach was shaped by his parents' need to find a place of peace and joy away from the violence of The Troubles in Belfast. Their family days out remain a vivid emotional memory for him and he has chosen to live by the sea which he visits every day. He feels very strongly about what is happening to our natural world, particularly the sea, and became quite animated when speaking about what needs to be done:

> *'we certainly need to look at what we're doing with plastics and things like that, that all needs to stop. It's just crazy, you know, we should have known 20 years ago, this is the most stupidest thing that we're doing […] it's just stupid.'*

When Sean made side-mentions about his dog or of loving the sea to his therapist, he may have been expressing his eco-political self and signalling a need for this part of him to be met. This seems to have not been recognised by the therapist, perhaps because their own eco-political self was defended against feelings of guilt, grief, fear, anger, powerlessness and so on. Simultaneously, the social defences described

above that influence both Sean and his therapist are also in operation. If the therapist holds rigidly to the therapeutic contract, as a way of attending to their own need of ensuring that their eco-political self is not overwhelmed by the reality of the CEE, then they have failed to be the reliable and trusted other whom Sean's eco-political part-self can depend on. They have not been able to surrender to the process of thirdness, of meeting in the shared space of not knowing (Bion, 1965) and a shared exploration of the possibility of a catastrophic future. At the same time, if Sean holds to the perception that therapy is only for personal issues, his eco-political self will retreat. Instead of stepping out of an unconscious collusion, the collective defence that prevents engaging with the world as it really is, is maintained within the dyad. As a result the transitional space available for creative exploration of this part of Sean's self is significantly contracted. The opportunity for insight and to deepen the understanding of how Sean has got to where he is eco-politically is lost.

7.3.1.2 In the context of activism

In contrast, for activists it is possible that their eco-political selves are meeting other activists' eco-political selves such that there is mutual recognition and the opportunity for thirdness to occur as they plan creative actions together in the shared purpose of their protests. XR particularly incorporates playfulness into their actions. They use street theatre, music, elaborate installations such as the pink boat parked in Trafalgar Square, in a shared expression of the feelings associated with their eco-political selves. This seems to meet Winnicott's description of playing in the transitional space:

> *'Playing is not inside […] nor is it outside… it is not a part of the repudiated world ..which the individual has decided to recognize (with whatever difficulty and even pain) as truly external […] To control what is outside one has to do things, not simply to think or to wish, and doing things takes time,. Playing is doing' (Winnicott, 1971, p.41)*

The 'not-real' is used to engage with the 'real' and in this way made bearable. The festival atmosphere often evoked in large scale XR protests may offer a way of working through the social trauma of the CEE, in a similar way to traditional festivals and rituals which have been argued to provide a means of expression of the problem and at the same time a way of living with it (Crociani-Windland, 2011). This sense of creativity and playfulness was expressed by my XR participants. For

instance, activist Donna described how she and her friends created a mandala on the pavement at an XR protest:

> *'We sang some songs, carried flags, processed. […] So with some friends, I set up an altar. And we'd brought all kinds of beautiful leaves and flowers from the garden […] and we just made a kind of beautiful nature mandala […] and we sat singing just very simple kind of songs that were about peace that were about nature and our love for the natural world.'*

Donna had spoken in the first interview about her grief, '*as the kind of information of how bad it actually is was coming in, the grief that I was feeling was so deep'*. It seems that the transitional space created between herself and her friends allowed a creative expression of the shared grief which was transformed into an expression of love.

My internal response to Donna's account of singing and laying flowers and leaves on the pavement is worth noting here. I felt a warmth and appreciation of her attempt to bring something beautiful to the protest and at the same time I thought, 'that's a bit wet'. I seemed to have internalised both a 'fighty' block and disrupt mode of activism and a NVCD mode and oscillated between the two. This suggests that it is possible for activists to inhabit more than one identity, oscillating between different unconscious basic-assumption group mentalities and engaging in different approaches at different times.

Activist Steven enjoyed the playfulness of the XR actions,

> *'it's great to be connected up and people are dis disco-bediencing and dancing and all that sort of thing […] shoved me out of my normal social limits into something so much more random'*

He later joined the red rebels street theatre group because he was *'curious about expressing something as a rebel'*. This curiosity is akin to a type of exploratory play occurring within a transitional space. Steven's account of his involvement with XR included a sense of fun and enjoyment and a more sociological perspective may add further understanding. Jasper (1998) points out that the richer a movement's culture, with rituals, songs, chants and so on, the more pleasurable participation becomes. Shared engagement in a movement's culture reinforces affective bonds, friendships and solidarity, it transports individuals to another plane, a 'collective effervescence' (Jasper, 1998, p.418) and it contributes to collective identity.

Another expression of creativity was used by the hunt saboteur, Natalie. She is a self-employed artist and refers to her paintings as 'artivism'. She explained,

> *'a lot of the themes of what I was interested in ended up going into my artwork… it also gives me a persona where I'm quite, in my art I can be quite outwardly like anti-hunt'*

Painting seems to afford Natalie a different experience of engaging with her activism that does not involve violent actions. She is not afraid to be '*outwardly anti-hunt'*, whereas in her personal life, she has to maintain a level of secrecy about her views and actions. She can inhabit a particular persona and this seems different to that of being out '*in the field'* (another war-like allusion).

Natalie gave me permission to look at her artwork on her website and I was struck by the prettiness of the images together with the harsh reality of the text that goes with them. This juxtaposition caused a shock response in me, it caught me out. It was a subversive and less direct form of activism but, nonetheless, a very effective way of getting her message across.

As well as earning money for herself and the causes she is involved with, I wondered whether Natalie's painting may also give her an opportunity to process some of the affect and emotion generated from her actions albeit on her own. She said,

> *'I was doing a lot of work against the Badger cull, they kind of felt like to me, they coincided with memories of activism that I'd done quite strongly'*

Was she was processing her experiences ('memories') through her art?

Returning to the function of the group in relation to transitional space and play, when comparing the narratives of Luke and Natalie who were involved in hunt sabotage to that of the XR participants, my sense of the transitional space created in their groups had a different tone. Luke said,

> *'when [feelings are] talked about in my circles, there's like quite a lot of it's quite often sort of sardonic and flippant and punky and humorous, but then it's sort of like this because it's like, there's a lot of excitement involved […] I would say like in terms of conversation is, it sort of veers wildly between, like stress (inaudible), and honestly, like, it's sort sort of sense of like, like jealousy.'*

The '*sardonic and flippant'* use of humour could be a way for the group to manage difficult feelings such as anger or fear associated with their actions. I also wondered whether talk within the group sometimes served to amplify feelings of anger in order to galvanise members of the group to imagine, create and engage in risky acts. Luke alluded to his own experience,

> *'let's say someone wants to like smash up an arms company. And then it would sort of make all the sharing of like, posts that you've done on social media for the last like two months seem like completely redundant. So then, you sort of think, cool do that.'*

However, Luke also seemed ambivalent about this saying,

> *'And then there's also like a lot of like, severe implications [..] you're doing, like real activism. And then you're yeah, and then you're kind of like punished for it, but it kind of again makes it means that you've done something that's probably making real difference [..] am I kind of cut out for this? Is this really like my struggle? And so there's a bit of like a it's kind of an up and down thing'*

Luke seems to oscillate in this extract, as though he was engaging in an internal dialogue –

there are 'severe implications'

but 'you're doing real activism'

but then 'you're punished'

but that means you're 'making a real difference'

but 'am I cut out for this'.

Luke's apparent ambivalence illustrates the point made by Crociani-Windland and Hoggett (2012):

> *'Overly intense affect has ambivalent potential in terms of enjoyment: a rollercoaster ride can be felt as exhilarating by suspending us in pure sensation, or terrifying.' (p.173)*

My findings suggest that psychological play engaged with in different activist groups may serve different therapeutic purposes. For the XR participants the transitional space seemed to provide a way of containing and transforming intense affect and

overwhelming feelings, reinforcing affective ties and collective identity through the pleasure experienced in shared play, the positive effects of which stayed with them afterwards. For the hunt saboteurs the psychological play within the group possibly fired them up, engaging their agency and potentially preparing them for dangerous action, but perhaps creating more ambivalent feelings. When analysing the transcripts of the hunt saboteurs I associated to the way in which soldiers engaged in war are given amphetamines to increase and maintain performance during dangerous operations (Bower, 2003). It made me consider the need for some kind of debriefing process for activists following intense and dangerous actions. This is something that XR groups engage in as part of their regenerative culture. Natalie told me about an incident where she was with another female saboteur when they got physically attacked by twelve huntsmen. When they had got away from the men, Natalie said '*we just got back in the landy and ate cake and went home (laughs). And that was like a normal day for us'.* Eating cake may have been an effective way of regulating their affect but there did not seem to be a formal way of debriefing for them. Natalie may have developed her own way of processing these kinds of experiences through her solitary painting rather than doing this with her activist group.

Summary

When eco-distress is taken consciously or unconsciously into a therapy space or activist space, defences can be activated. Splitting of inner concerns and outer action occurs in therapy and activism contexts but in reverse such that sociopolitical concerns tend to be excluded from therapy and deeper inner reflection tends to be excluded from activism to varying degrees depending on the group culture. Together with socially constructed rules of therapy and activism these defences serve to maintain the equilibrium of the individual and the group. The importance of emotional work is becoming more recognised within activist movements and reflexive activism is developing (Lawson, 2021; Hoggett, 2009), something which therapists could support. Similarly, the issue of eco-distress is being recognised by the therapist profession and training is beginning to be offered.

This now leads us on to the next chapter where I consider the implications of my findings for both therapy and activism.

Chapter 8 – Discussion Part 2

Implications for Therapy and Activism

Introduction

This chapter furthers the discussion of the previous chapter to consider the practical implications for therapeutic practice relating to eco-distress. It suggests that therapy has an important role to play in supporting people to cope, change and live with the CEE but it requires significant recrafting in order to do this. The way therapy is conducted, where it is conducted and with whom needs to be questioned and therapists who wish to work with material arising from the CEE will need to adapt their practices. They will require the support of their professional bodies, training organisations, supervisors and peers to equip themselves sufficiently.

8.1 Therapists need to do their own work around the CEE

Therapists are human too. Like everyone else, we can only bear a certain amount of reality and are subjected to the same perverse culture (Hoggett, 2013) as everyone else and will be defended. As previously mentioned, therapists can be anxious and conflicted when discussing sociopolitical issues with clients which can affect the therapeutic alliance (Farrar and Hanley, 2023). As therapists we will need to address our own feelings about the CEE in order to help clients bear the situation and 'stay with the trouble' (Haraway, 2016). Weintrobe (2021) refers to this as becoming 'climate aware'. More than a simple cognitive awareness, becoming climate aware involves difficult and painful emotional work. It involves dealing with that which cannot be repaired and the prospect of an unsafe and unliveable world. It is likely to feel unbearable at times. Therapist participants sometimes spoke directly in the interviews about their own feelings regarding the CEE, expressing guilt, grief, fear and anger; for example Lee's guilt at not being as 'eco' as her client or Lester's anger with those who are self-righteous. Sometimes these feelings were beneath-the-surface and had to be interpreted, for example Jenny's grief and horror after vacuuming her client's feather (see section 5.4.1.1). Often defences were used to avoid these feelings such as splitting, projection and disavowal. These feelings and defences need to be acknowledged, understood, processed, and worked through (Allured, 2022) before therapists are able to work meaningfully with such material in

their practice. Although I have been focussing on working with clients who may be experiencing eco-distress, doing their own emotional work regarding the CEE would also be important for therapists working with clients who are climate change deniers and expressing these views in sessions. Without having processed their own feelings about the CEE the therapist could get drawn into acting out their anxiety, anger, guilt and so on with the client.

Although I found that therapists were very comfortable talking with clients about the natural world and its importance for health and wellbeing, it seems as a profession we do not know how to talk about the CEE, a point also made by other authors (Kassouf, 2022; Aspey, 2021). We can tend to 'coast', remaining in comfortable topics and discourses to avoid adding to the client's pain as well as maintaining our own equilibrium (Hirsch, 2008). We may well fear being opened up ourselves to distressing feelings, and additionally as Nellie, said fear it will render us unfit to work with our clients. If we revisit the extract from therapist Sarah's interview shared in the previous chapter (section 7.2.1) we can consider how she resists becoming climate aware:

> *'I know that there's um a part of us that she [the client] is trying to wake up, which is, you know, don't be fools, don't buy into things, don't trust, don't take things as if we're all safe […] I don't want to live my life like that every day […] I'm not saying it doesn't bother me um but I don't want it to bother me to the point where it starts to take away from my enjoyment of life.'*

I see the client acting like a whistle-blower, 'trying to wake us [and Sarah] up … don't trust'. Rather than taking the client's concerns as a truth, Sarah chooses to position her as 'deviant' (Weintrobe, 2021, p.197) saying '*I feel very concerned for her […] she's, you know, she's losing teeth, because she's grinding her teeth at night'*.

What is interesting is that Sarah previously reported an interest in death and the afterlife ('*he* [Dad] *used to say that he was slightly concerned that he never met anyone so obsessed with death as me'*) yet she is very reluctant to engage with the death and destruction caused by the CEE. I imagine that she can engage cognitively with the concept of death but is defended against engaging emotionally with the scale of death and destruction the CEE presents which would breach her ontological security. She, therefore, does not engage with her client's distress about the CEE

even when they bring it directly. Without doing the difficult and painful work of becoming climate aware, Sarah will not be able to offer clients the safe space to explore eco-distress.

As an eco-therapist Rob was much more conscious of his difficulties and defences, having done his own work around the CEE:

> *'It's very, very difficult to engage with the subject of climate change, and destruction of habitats and the level at which it's happening, the level at which it's changing that that, you know, we're we're literally falling over the edge of a cliff. I don't know if we're able to really think about that, sadly, or I don't know how able we are. Er um it's very crippling, to even begin to think about it and so I think that we avoid it. The clients are avoiding it. I'm avoiding it. We're all avoiding it.'*

The distinction between an emotionally significant conversation about the CEE and a passing comment is based on the willingness of the therapist to follow a comment up (Seaman, 2016). As argued in the previous chapter, the tendency of the therapists to not pick up on clients' side-mentions is a form of disavowal. In choosing to see these side-mentions as small talk therapists are not only following the social norms of therapy, they may also be managing their own difficult feelings regarding the CEE (Norgaard, 2011). Norgaard reminds us that when considering the social processes of constructing what is seen as normal, we should 'pay careful attention to moments when topics appear briefly, under the surface of an interaction, only to disappear again' (Norgaard, 2011, p.41). Side-mentions related to the CEE do exactly this.

The lack of follow up could be interpreted unconsciously by the client that the therapist is choosing their own sanity (Benjamin, 2009). When client participants apologised to me for talking about their climate concerns during the interviews, it was as though they felt they had gone too far or done me harm in some way by speaking the truth. Deborah was concerned enough to ask me how I was feeling at the end of our second interview. It was as though she needed to check that she had not disturbed my equilibrium. Doing our own work around our feelings concerning the CEE ensures that we can hold the client's distress.

When a client makes such a side-mention, they are signalling both a wish to explore it *and* a wish for it to be ignored. The real question they are unconsciously asking their therapist is 'Can you bear what I am finding unbearable' (Weintrobe, 2021). For

example, Elaine told me about how upset she feels '*if they want to chop down a tree'* in her local area but also said *'it's frightening if you stop and think about [the CEE] for too long'.* Through supportive and gentle exploration in our interview, however, she was able to express anger at what was happening in the Amazon rainforest, her fear that it may be too late, that *'we've already got to the, you know, the point of no return'* and her lack of trust in politicians. Clients require the safety of knowing their therapist can bear this thing, that they will not simply pretend the world is safe. They need their therapist to provide a secure base and a container that can hold them as they allow their defences to drop away and descend into their grief, terror, rage and remorse. Elaine said, *'Do you know I've never talk about it for this long in any one time. It's quite amazing what I'm coming out with'.*

As Kassouf (2022) points out, there is a need for therapists to find a way of working with this material in a safe way:

> *'…until analysts are able to speak about this on-going trauma [of the CEE], the majority of people with whom we work clinically continue to be left alone with their unarticulated fears about what is happening on the planet. Together, we need to name the dread and try to make it potentially tolerable'(Kassouf, 2022, p.73)*

We need to help the client to find expression for their experience so it can be qualified through the naming of emotion and either amplified or dampened (Massumi, 2002) as needed. Multiple and contradictory meanings need to be explored in the transitional space, and we need to let the client know that 'we can be in this together'. By accompanying the client, the client can be supported to bear the pain, explore their feelings from a shared vantage point, create the potential for choice and ultimately find some agency with which to engage with the problem. Working with and processing the affect is a vital part of any therapeutic process. If it does not occur there is risk that grief, as expressed in the interviews, becomes generalised melancholia or depression, anxiety becomes free-floating and anger can lack an object or be deflected towards the wrong object, such as migrants for instance.

My findings suggest that some climate emotions are easier to express than others. For instance, being angry with the government for allowing fracking (Pete), may be expressed more readily. The anger is outward-facing and can connect us with our energy and agency. Emotions that require a deeper and more painful engagement,

such as grief or shame, are more inward-facing and can be more difficult to experience and express. Also, some are more socially acceptable than others depending on the cultural context. For Luke, expressing his anxiety about his activism was less acceptable than expressing his disgust for landowners. Therapists may have an important role for supporting clients to contact, express and process these more difficult emotions.

Being with the client in this way is not easy, however. We may feel unable to provide a stable and holding therapeutic environment for the client to work through feelings associated with the CEE because our assumption that the external world is stable and safe no longer holds. Instead we are being constantly reminded that our external environment is unstable, unpredictable, chaotic and threatening. As Kassouf (2022, p.71) says, 'the reality of a relatively predictable present which underlies many a therapeutic holding environment, is irreparably disrupted'. In such a situation, those of us in touch with our own feelings about the CEE may feel uncontained or find it very difficult to speak to our client's pain about it, we may feel as though we have nothing therapeutic to offer the client and feel doubly powerless. I have certainly felt this way in sessions with clients who bring their distress about the CEE. Working with our own and our clients' feelings about the CEE I suggest is psychically different to working through other interpersonal traumas we have experienced in our lives. Rather than reflecting on something that is in the past, the CEE presents us with trauma in the present and, most significantly, in the future. We are 'in the thick of trauma' (Kassouf, 2022, p.72). Climate trauma then is not something to be overcome but to be lived with. This will require a very different approach to the way we are trained and the way we work with climate distress.

So becoming 'climate aware' is more than simply knowing there is a CEE. It involves facing into the reality of the present trauma and the trauma to come. It involves feeling our own fear, sadness, anger, and guilt and becoming aware of the many ways we consciously and unconsciously defend against such feelings. It involves recognising the way in which sociopolitical issues of injustice are all interconnected; the CEE is not just about carbon. If we do not do this deep and painful work towards becoming climate aware we will be unable to provide the deep listening required in relation to the CEE. We risk projecting our own distress onto others, including our clients, and remaining defended and unable to help those clients

for whom eco-distress is a real and present experience, even if on the edge of awareness. We will be unable to offer the empathy that comes from having felt the emotional impact ourselves.

8.2 Therapists need to be more proactive

There is evidence that clients want their therapists to take the lead (Cooper et al., 2019). They need permission to tell their story, silence is not enough and they are often relieved when asked a direct question (Wotton and Johnston, 2021). During the interviews I asked the clients the direct question, 'Can you tell me about your thoughts and feelings about climate change and other environmental problems?' and clients were willing to explore these with me. I also asked the participants what their experience of talking with me about this material had been. Many of them expressed it as a positive experience (as described later in Chapter 9) demonstrating a therapeutic benefit of the research interview (Gillespie, 2019; Bondi, 2013) through eliciting reflections and insights. When a safe space is created through supportive and deep listening, skills therapists have in abundance, proactively exploring feelings about the CEE can be positive, enriching and transformative for clients and can help them to recover a sense of agency. Although it is important for therapists to respond to the client's immediate therapeutic need, often related to personal rather than planetary crisis, I argue that therapists also need to have the courage to begin these conversations when it feels appropriate. Recent work in this area suggests that a therapeutic process that encompasses relatedness and allows space for clients to share climate concerns, can then facilitate more open communication outside of the therapeutic context in conversations with family and friends, and empowers people to take action (Budziszewska and Jonsson, 2021).

Opening up side-mentions proactively could lead to a deeper understanding of the client's feelings regarding the CEE and how this is linked to their personal histories. Kassouf (2022) uses clinical vignettes to illustrate this. I was particularly struck by her description of her work with 'Harold' who frequently began sessions with reports about the weather:

> *'Most sessions began with Harold commenting on extreme heat, extreme cold, removing extra layers, or every now and then enjoying, if tentatively, a beautiful day. Had I been more attuned to the more-than-human environment in sessions, less unsure about*

> *how to work with my own evolving countertransference, I might have realized that Harold was talking about more than just the weather.' (p.66)*

In my interviews I was able to explore these seemingly peripheral topics with participants and together build a shared understanding. Sean's close bond with his dog was linked to his relationship with his grandmother and has led to his strong empathy for all animals and a passion for an ethical approach to animal farming and food production. Elaine's connection with trees was linked to her experience as a teenager growing up with warring parents when she found sanctuary in the branches of a tree and has led her to continue to seek the solace of trees and to try to protect them.

Returning to Jasper's point outlined in Chapter 8, section 8.2.2, 'inchoate anxieties and fears must be transformed into moral indignation and outrage' (Jasper, 1998, p.409). In other words, if vague or partially formed feelings which are only on the edge of awareness are not brought more fully into conscious awareness, there is a risk that they remain as generalised feelings of unease, distress, anxiety or depression. Worse still, they can suddenly flood the person and they become overwhelming. Both outcomes are unhelpful for the individual and for dealing with the problem. Without the means of symbolic representation afforded by language, feelings remain as affective states rather than emotions with a tangible object (Crociani-Windland and Hoggett, 2012). Conversely, if these feelings are brought to the surface in a safe space with appropriate pacing and regulation, they can be transformed and channelled into more useful responses, again for the individual and the planet. Grief can be attached to a lost object and mourned, fear to a specific threat and so on. As Crociani-Windland and Hoggett point out, unlike affect, emotions are meaningful and intelligent, 'they point towards something' (Crociani-Windland and Hoggett, 2012, p.171). One of the therapist's tasks is, therefore, to intentionally hear, observe and enquire about vague feeling states and affect regarding the CEE – 'The aim is to make the intensity bearable and to channel it towards thoughtful action, acknowledging and accepting limitation and hardships' (Crociani-Windland and Hoggett, 2012, p.175). As Bodnar says, 'Some of the people we see might need their psychoanalysts to witness their feelings about environmental degradation' (Bodnar, 2008, p.509). This needs to be done proactively; it can be done at an assessment stage when exploring what troubles the client and/or during

ongoing sessions when the client makes a side-mention related to the natural world generally or the CEE specifically.

However, the non-directive stance which underlies many therapeutic approaches including person-centred/humanistic approaches and psychodynamic approaches can be a barrier to such a proactive stance. We are trained not to put too much of ourselves in the session. The client, or their unconscious, leads. From a humanistic perspective, the view of the client as expert in their own life frames the therapist as someone who helps them to find their own answers rather than directing them. From a psychodynamic perspective, the client's unconscious leads the way and the therapist is an interpreter of the material.

There are potential problems with this non-directive stance. Firstly, as already pointed out, evidence shows that many clients want the therapist to take more of a lead, to be more active and directive. Secondly, as Cooper (2020) points out and a psycho-social perspective supports, intersubjectivity means that we can never be truly non-directive. We are always co-creating our experience in the company of another. Cooper makes the point 'If they try to direct, it will influence the client in certain ways; but if they try not to direct, it will also influence the client in certain ways' (Cooper, 2020, online). By not exploring side-mentions about the CEE, therapists are influencing clients, potentially steering them away from this distressing material, reinforcing the clients' perception that therapy is for the 'little stuff' of inter-personal problems and/or that the therapist is not interested in this topic. Additionally, it can foster a passive form of therapy where the therapist sits back and fails to take the initiative. My therapist participants saw sticking with the client's presenting issue as ethical good practice and will have been trained to work in this way, but there is a danger that such passivity is a way of coasting (Hirsch, 2008) or avoiding difficult material. In private practice therapists rely on clients for income so may avoid making therapy too challenging for the client (Wotton and Johnston, 2021).

Although clients may want therapists to take the lead, they are unlikely to outwardly criticise the therapist if they do not, as my participants demonstrated. This highlights two important aspects of the client-therapist dynamic. One is the power differential between therapist and client. Sean blamed himself entirely for not bringing the

subject up with his therapist and Deborah was very concerned that I did not name her therapist in any publications. The second aspect is the risk of a mutual unconscious collusion between client and therapist in each other's disavowal of the CEE.

Being more proactive in the work would lead to an equally shared responsibility for what is discussed, where therapist and client mutually raise questions, introduce subjects and explore a wider field. Samuels challenges us when he says, 'psychoanalytic exploration mustn't run from unpalatable things' (Samuels, 2012, p.171). This could mean not moving on too quickly from clients' throw away comments for example. Therapists could even consider disclosing their own concerns regarding the CEE, assuming they had done sufficient processing of their own as suggested in the previous section. Sharing one's own vulnerability can call into being the third potential space where the client can process these feelings safely. In effect the therapist is demonstrating a route out of helplessness (Benjamin, 2012) and drawing the client into becoming 'an analytic subject who can engage the "secret" truth together' (Benjamin, 2012, p.51). Such encounters are powerful meaning-making opportunities.

8.3 Holding hope in therapy

Christian Sell (2022) draws on Bion and Winnicott and the concepts of containment and transitional space to explore the role of hope in therapy. I have drawn on his ideas to consider how feelings of powerlessness, hopelessness and despair in relation to the CEE can be worked with in therapy and through activism.

When faced with the reality of the CEE, many people experience feelings of powerlessness (what difference can I make?) For example, client Margaret said, '*I don't know what to do, I feel very powerless again'*. Powerlessness can lead to hopelessness (there is nothing that can be done) and then despair (complete loss of hope). I think client Elaine was on the edge of these feelings when she expressed a fear that it was too late and that perhaps '*we've already got to the, you know, the point of no return'*. These are feelings we defend against through splitting, projection, disavowal and intellectualisation, as discussed in previous chapters. The challenge for us as therapists is how to help our clients to face the reality without both of us slipping into despair. In other words, 'how do we raise alarm bells without bursting our eardrums?' (Ornstein, 2022, p.337).

This is extremely difficult. It is frightening to wait with a client who is in the throes of hopelessness, to share similar feelings and to feel powerless to help – we feel doubly powerless. Feeling powerless leads to feelings of vulnerability and anxiety for client and therapist alike. If we return to the extract from Sarah's interview used earlier, when she says '*I would want to feel that I can live my life, and I've had as much personal power as I can'* she is telling me that she does not want to feel powerless in the face of the CEE and other world problems and so she chooses to avoid '*fearful facts'*. As Bion (1965) asserts, therapists should resist the urge to know. We need to guard against defensively grasping to assert control at these points by becoming directive, for instance by making practical suggestions about how the client can assuage their feelings of powerlessness about the CEE. This is something that I have found myself doing at times with clients and therapist participants reported the same. Lee said that when clients bring up concerns about global issues such as the CEE she reminds them that they cannot single-handedly save the world and advises that they should not listen to too much news. Sarah advises clients to walk in the woods.

Such a superficial engagement with the issue of the CEE seems to offer a partial catharsis, a release of some anxiety for both client and therapist. There is a sense of relief for the client because it has been mentioned and for the therapist because they have offered some suggestions. However, a deeper and more creative exploration has been avoided and the fuller personal, social and global truth of the CEE remains distorted for both. In the cathartic moment, client and therapist feel that some action has been taken, the issue has been dealt with, when in fact there has been little emotional and rational engagement that could drive action.

Instead, Sell (2022) suggests that a particular kind of hope is required, a radical 'hope against hope [..] the continuation or regaining of hope in spite of acknowledging the seeming impossibility or extreme improbability of what is hoped for' (Sell, 2022, p.354). This is not a regressive and defensive hope based on wishful thinking but a productive hope that can lead to change. Therapist Sarah's defensive grasping onto hope that the benevolent universe would save us is a good example of a regressive hope.

> *'I don't buy into that lack of hope. I think sometimes that in the relationship with clients, our trusting and faith and belief in the*

> *good of the universe, not just this earthly world that we're living on, but that the universe is supporting us […] if I embody that hope that in some kind of way, it's transferred somehow'*

This extract from my research journal illustrates the seductive nature of this defensive hope – *'I want to shake her awake, and at the same time I envy her rosy view'.* It is not unusual in the therapy community to come across the view that our job is to foster hope. For instance, a letter from a member in the BACP journal written in response to an article about eco-anxiety spoke about the need to give 'hope among the handwringing' (BACP, 2022, p.12).

By contrast, a productive hope is one where reality is faced and feelings of powerlessness are acknowledged. Both therapist and client let go into the feeling of not knowing (Bion, 1965) and sit in uncertainty and doubt, without control of the outcome. In such moments, the therapist has to endure their own feelings of powerlessness, both in terms of knowing how to help the client and feeling powerless in the face of the CEE. At the same time they must try to maintain an openness to the objective reality of the CEE as they work with this material. They have to be willing to enter the transitional space, where something from within (inner) is added to external reality (outer), where they and their client can be creative and allow something new to emerge without any desire for a particular outcome.

Sell suggests that therapists need to 'keep alive, well and awake' (Sell, 2022, p.365). This means therapists need to attend to their own self-care to maintain their vitality and faith in the presence of goodness in the world, as well as the badness. They need to also stay informed with regard to the reality of the CEE and to ensure that they access appropriate supervision with a supervisor who is also climate aware.

8.4 Hope and activism

In activism, the very act of acting suggests the subject possesses a radical hope against hope. Drawing on Sell (2022) once again, activism seems to take place in what he terms a medio-passive register, where the subject is neither fully active nor fully passive. Instead activists are involved *in* the process and at the same time being acted on *by* the process. They are *doing* and at the same time being transformed. Through a collective creative process the objective reality of the CEE is faced and a space is created for something new to emerge, an action, a pledge, a commitment,

that transforms feelings of powerlessness and hopelessness into something else. This was expressed by activist Carol,

> *'if you're doing something, if you think you're doing something, it feels very different from if you feel powerless. If this was all just going on in your thinking - this is irrevocable, and I'm powerless and helpless, and there's nothing I can do - you know, you could very easily get swamped with grief. But there's something about activism, that just sort of makes it bearable. It's like, yeah, but at least we've got a chance of winning. And even if we don't, I've done what I can.'*

This idea of action as an antidote to powerlessness and as facilitating a radical hope, hoping even when what is hoped for is highly unlikely, was present in several of the activist narratives. As discussed in Chapter 6, connecting with their own agency was an important part of being an activist and a way of counteracting powerlessness. Participants spoke about experiencing people power, pitching themselves against the power of the state and challenging systems of power, and therapist Rob spoke about the importance of expressing anger as a means of countering powerlessness (see Chapter 5, section 5.4.1.4). It suggests a link between anger, agency and action with affect finding an appropriate object.

As discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, anger regarding the CEE and other related political issues was expressed by several participants either directly ('*I'm very angry'* – activist Pete) or indirectly by tone and gestures ('*And it's just so stupid because it doesn't have to be that way. It's not like, Oh, this is really terrible. And that's just how it is. No! we could actually change it*' – activist Donna). For some participants, anger was on the edge of awareness. Client Martin said,

> *'People come out and shoot and hunt and four by fours, just run roughshod over the beautiful areas. It's because they don't respect it. It's because they feel threatened by it. It's not only it's not a park, it's not an urban park that is safe and controlled. I may have said too much I'm sorry if I have.'*

His apology suggests he feels his anger may be wrong, anti-social perhaps. It made me wonder how anger was dealt with as he was growing up. Client Phil became aware as we talked how he was suppressing his anger, which he described as passion,

> *'Why am I not unleashing a bit more of that you know my knowledge and my passion and my enthusiasm for that. There's*

> *something in me that's stopping and maybe there is part of me that's going this is pretty big, you sure you want to go there, you know, there's a whole thing in the back of my mind that says, careful, careful, because it's actually pretty scary.'*

Perhaps he was afraid that if he allowed himself to feel angry about environmental destruction, it would lead to what he saw as an '*extreme response*', a form of terrorism perhaps. This may put him in a difficult position given his role at work. Framing his anger as passion could be a way to make it more socially acceptable.

This is where I see a bridge between the work of therapy and the work of activism. If we are willing and able to support a client to fully explore feelings related to the CEE and connect these to the client's history and experience, then there is an opportunity to help the client move from a sense of powerlessness, to find some radical hope, and to connect instead to their sense of agency. This can then help the client to locate themselves within the range of possible actions they could take, large or small, individually and collectively.

8.5 Revisioning eco-activism and therapy as eco-psychosocial practices

8.5.1 Reflective activism

Within activist movements, there is growing awareness of the dangers of burnout if our inner world is not attended to. XR for instance instils the importance of a regenerative culture, taking time out to rest and recover after an intense period of protest and ensuring there is a culture of care for each other, captured in their motto 'we are all crew'. Similarly, the importance of emotional work (Hoggett, 2019) is becoming more recognised within activist movements and reflexive activism is developing (Lawson, 2021; Hoggett, 2009). My findings lend support to this development. However, this inner work is often framed as a means of coping with the demands of activism rather than part of the process of making social change and a true attempt to integrate inner and outer worlds. Integrating the inner personal world with outer action could allow activists to make more informed choices about which groups they join and what actions they become involved with. In Luke's words they can ask themselves, 'am I cut out for this?' The interviews with my activist participants highlight several areas where reflection may be useful.

Group Culture

Reflecting on the culture of the group could highlight problematic dynamics. Noticing what is celebrated or frowned upon, what is spoken about or not spoken about, who is considered friend or foe can help to bring group culture into focus. A competitive culture where members need to 'out do' one another can lead to individuals stepping into actions that they may not be emotionally or physically prepared for. A culture of total commitment or martyrdom can lead to burn out. Celebrating self-sacrifice can reinforce a culture of self-abuse. Reflecting on how group culture could be mirroring personal history may illuminate destructive repetitive patterns for individual activists. During the interview Natalie made the connection between having grown up in an '*extreme religion'* and needing to still '*feel extreme about something'*.

Defusing and Debriefing

Space to reflect and debrief following significant actions could help to discharge affect and counter the risk of trauma caused by being in dangerous and volatile situations. Natalie spoke about having post-traumatic stress due to her activism and being on '*high alert all the time'*. Although defusing and debriefing is used in many settings as part of a structured response to critical incidents (Dyregrov, 1989), I am suggesting something less formalised but with similar elements of active listening to the person who has had the experience. It would include listening to their story, how it made them feel, their sensory experiences and how the event can be integrated into the rest of their life experiences.

XR have developed this practice to some extent through their regenerative culture and this is something that other activist groups could borrow or adapt. Individuals within groups could learn the skills to be able to offer this kind of listening.

Co- support

Employing a buddy system or a co-counselling model could create an ongoing regular and consistent space for safe reflection. Elizabeth Allured, a psychoanalyst and activist, meets weekly with a climate buddy. Together they support each other through the difficult feelings that knowing about the CEE evokes and to 'open space for tears' (Allured, 2022, p.342). They also help each other to re-connect with their relationship to the more-than-human world.

Some activists may find it easier to share feelings and experiences in a one-to-one context rather than in a group setting. Conversely, small reflection groups may be preferable for others, particularly if this is held by an appointed facilitator. There is much to be learned from group-based Emotionally Reflexive Methodologies (Hamilton, 2019) such as discussed in Chapter 3, section 3.3.1.3. Mutual support can be drawn on and a sense of interconnectedness with others in the group can help to foster a sense of resilience. Hamilton (2019) argues that such group-based approaches to processing feelings give the opportunity to 'link inner world with outer action' (Hamilton, 2019, p.166).

8.5.2 Therapy as an eco-psychosocial practice

My findings support an argument for revisioning therapy as an eco-psychosocial practice (Hollway et al., 2022) such that it is broadened out beyond the individual to consider the social, ecological and political issues affecting us because psychological change is intrinsic to cultural change (Robertson, 2022) and cultural change on a global scale is what is required to tackle the CEE crisis. As Bodnar asserts,

> *'The person and the larger social field mutually construct psychological reality. The environment, the earth that sustains life, underlies the social field and the person.' (Bodnar, 2008, p.485)*

Therefore, when a client comes for therapy, we should aim to help them disentangle the complexity of their distress and understand what belongs to their internal world and what belongs to their external world. As psychoanalyst Nancy Hollander says, we need a 'space in our minds for politics in the clinical setting' where 'concerns of critical social issues should be a legitimate part of the analyst/patient dialogue' (Hollander, 2009, p.8).

The participants in my study seemed to be saying that there was no such space for the social and political in therapy. Clients and therapists saw therapy as being for personal issues. This seems to fit what Hoggett calls 'unreflective accommodation' (Hoggett, 2022, p.23) an automatic getting on with the task in hand. A pragmatic perspective also needs to be considered, however. There is finite time in a therapy session, and often a finite number of sessions available for the client. The different concerns which are present will, therefore, compete for that time. Both client and therapist will need to prioritise what will be discussed. When such practical issues

are also reinforced by social rules regarding what should be discussed, a powerful dynamic is constructed.

My therapist identity inevitably led me to become curious during the interviews about the connection between clients' presenting issues in therapy and their relationship with the natural world. For instance, when Sean told me about his distress as a child when his friends would catch wasps and bees and put them in a jar, I wondered how his identification with the insects connected to his personal difficulties, perhaps feeling trapped in his life in some way. Sean grew up in Belfast, a city *'associated with violence, associated with war, was associated with conflict*'. For his family, weekend trips to the beach were an escape to a '*place of peace'*.

Client Martin began to make connections for himself in our interview as he pondered why he tends not to speak about his feelings regarding the CEE with others:

> *'I dunno I um I don't often feel that people, er maybe this is the crux of the problem, I don't know but I don't I don't always feel that people want to listen to me (laughs) er I don't always feel appreciated, as it were. And again, this touches probably on my history of self-worth, and er low self-esteem.'*

Revisiting Rust's assertion that 'Our relationships with the more-than-human world are woven into, and inseparable from, relationships with self, family, culture and the earth' (Rust, 2020, p.89) I argue that the inter-connection between culture and the individual, the psycho and the social, is a web of multiple relationships that needs to be disentangled for a fuller understanding to be gained and potential change to occur. Groves et al. (2016) agree, proposing that 'agency is biographically patterned' and 'this patterning is a product of attachment relationships' (Groves et al., 2016, p.309). Maintaining an individualistic perspective may perpetuate feelings of powerlessness in the face of wider social and political issues, such as the CEE.

Kassouf (2022) encourages therapists to move away from their often unconscious 'anenvironmental orientation' (Kassouf, 2022, p.62) which excludes the nonhuman world from the therapeutic process and instead to listen analytically for moments when the CEE may enter sessions. Listening out for side-mentions from clients about material related to the CEE would be an example of this kind of listening. She also suggests that clients who have experienced interpersonal trauma in their lives have a 'traumatised sensibility' which can facilitate useful 'catastrophic thinking' (Kassouf,

2022, p.63), linking their past traumas to the present and imagined future trauma associated with the CEE.

> *'Catastrophic thinking took place with those whose interpersonal trauma had not broken them but broken them open, making them aware of their own permeability in generative, livable ways.' (Kassouf, 2022, p.64)*

> *'traumatized sensibility can draw strength from vulnerability and dependence rather than erect defenses' (ibid, p.71)*

Side-mentions related to the environment could indicate 'indirectly expressed trauma' (Mowat, 2022, p.6) about the CEE and together with a traumatised sensibility it could mean that annihilation *is* thinkable, despair *is* bearable and the unsayable *can* be said. In other words surviving trauma can lead to a resilience, the ability to carry on despite being broken. Although within the context of my research interviews it was not appropriate to explore participants' trauma histories, several of my client participants did share details regarding traumatic experiences. Participants spoke of violence, conflict, abortions, divorce, death of a spouse, highly critical parents, absent parents and warring parents. Their histories of trauma together with their ability to discuss their feelings about the CEE support Kassouf's concept of a traumatised sensibility. Their resilience in the face of these traumas could enable them to engage in catastrophic thinking and contemplate the CEE. However, a traumatic history may also render the client unable to bear further trauma and this possibility must also be considered.

Massumi (2021) suggests that past experiences are remembered by the body and social elements are absorbed, 'the body infolds contexts' (Massumi, 2021, p.32). This further supports my argument that when working as a climate-aware therapist, we need to understand how a client's past experience is interconnected with how they are responding to the CEE. Therapy is 'a cultural practice as well as a personal one' (Randall, 2005, p.177). Therapists working in an eco-psychosocial way would, therefore, broaden the scope of the therapy to include the ecological and sociopolitical. They would link the client's past trauma, potential inter-generational traumas, their individual vulnerabilities and resilience with their catastrophic thoughts and feelings about the CEE. They would ask broader questions, such as what is the relationship between this client's presenting issues and what is happening in the world? How does the client's history frame their experience of what is

happening in the world? How are my feelings about what is happening in the world affecting how I am meeting this client? Such questions will aid the therapist in judging whether the client has developed a resilience that enables them to engage in Kassouf's concept of catastrophic thinking or, conversely, whether their past trauma has broken them to such a degree that catastrophic thinking may be too overwhelming.

Therapists need to tread carefully when working at the edge of trauma. It is important to recognise where a client is on their personal climate crisis journey and work accordingly. Pihkala's model (Pihkala, 2022) may be useful in this regard (see Chapter 3, section 3.5); the therapeutic task will be different for instance if the client is in a state of shock compared to if they are experiencing burnout from their activism.

Working in this way is not the norm in therapy sessions, as evidenced by my findings. Drawing on social practice theory can help to understand why this is the case. A social practice perspective sees therapist and client as engaged in the *performance* of the social practice of therapy (Shove et al., 2012). As such they are vehicles that carry the *knowing* of how therapy is done, the routines and conventions that are followed, the rules of what is considered permissible and desirable (Adams, 2016). The practice of therapy, the pattern followed, is socially constructed in the minds of client and therapist and it is reproduced and perpetuated each time it occurs. In order to bring about a change to the way in which therapy is practiced, to construct an eco-psychosocial practice, a collective revisioning or recrafting is necessary. New elements need to be introduced or existing elements combined in new ways.

For instance, some argue for therapy to be taken out of the consulting room into public spaces such as cafes, theatres and so on. Hamilton's (2019) research into group and community-based approaches to working with the emotional responses to the CEE discussed in Chapter 3, section 3.3.1.3, suggest that group-based therapeutic spaces can allow safe processing of such feelings. My findings with activists partly support this. When the activist group culture allows space for reflection the bonds of attachment and interconnectedness can support a very therapeutic experience. The pleasure derived from taking part in action can counter-balance any eco-distress and

inner and outer worlds can be linked. However, if the group culture allows no such space, there is a risk of acting out and burnout. I will return to this issue later in this section in relation to activism.

The developing practice of eco-therapy can be seen as another form of recrafting. There is no unified model of eco-therapy but essentially it involves the inclusion of the natural nonhuman world within the therapeutic process. It works with the assumption that a reciprocity exists between the human mind and the natural nonhuman world and that strengthening this relationship can lead to an improvement in psychological health and resilience (Roszak et al., 1995). Eco-therapy can occur by taking the therapy outdoors in some form, by setting homework for the client to interact with the natural world between sessions, or by using natural objects within the therapy room. The natural world can be viewed as a co-therapist (Berger, 2006), a secure base (Jordan, 2015) a transitional space or object (Jordan, 2015) or as the shared third vantage point (Berger, 2006).

Therapist participants Amanda, Rob and Lee identified as eco-therapists, with some of their practice taking place outdoors. They spoke of the way in which the natural world was actively involved and supported them in the therapeutic process. They had clients who were in relationship with elements of the nonhuman world and these relationships were part of the therapy, the focus moving in and out between the client's inner world and the broader '*vaster body'* (Amanda). All the client participants shared memories of the way in which the natural world had been important in their childhoods. They spoke of being full of wonder and love for animals (Sean), developing very strong bonds with a particular animal (Deborah, Helen), forming a relationship with the natural environment (Phil), of playing freely in nature (Elaine, Margaret, Martin) and experiencing nature as a refuge (Helen, Elaine). This supports the ecopsychological idea that the natural more-than-human world plays a significant part in our psychological development.

However, it is necessary to caution against the fantasy that simply taking therapy outdoors and into green spaces or furnishing the consulting room with natural objects and images is a way of solving our inner and outer problems. A simple bolting on of ecological ideas onto therapy is not a true re-crafting and there is a risk that rather than achieving a re-integration of inner and outer, we end up simply

seeking solace from the outer world with the result that the split remains – 'In seeking to heal ourselves with nature…. We may be relying unconsciously on a construct that is an artefact of our wounded self' (Kassouf, 2023, p.13). We also risk perpetuating the individualistic and anthropocentric view that nature is a resource for healing. The theme of nature as medicine (see Chapter 5, section 5.1.1) draws on a wider Western medical discourse that objectifies nature positioning it as something which can be used, in a mechanistic way, to treat problems such as anxiety, depression and stress. There is now a growing interest in and acceptance of green prescribing where health professionals can write a prescription for spending time in nature as well as or instead of a prescription for anti-depressants for instance. In contrast, when therapist Amanda asked her client '*what sense did they have of the heron's awareness of [them]'* during a therapy session outdoors, she was encouraging the client to experience themselves as *part* of the ecosystem, not just a passive observer or (ab)user (see section 9.5.1 below for more details). This seems critical for the shift towards activism.

Totton (2012, p.253) argues for a 'reconceiving' of the therapeutic frame, changing the core attitudes towards boundaries for example, and developing an ecosystemic therapy. Totton challenges the traditional model of the 'hushed, holy isolation of the therapeutic pair' (Totton, 2012, p.260) which mimics the mother-infant dyad, arguing that although it may be helpful when focussing on early childhood experiences, it is not helpful when exploring clients' relationship with the natural world. Reconceiving the therapeutic frame will be easier when working in some modalities than others. Psychoanalysis, for instance, considers a firmly held frame as the cornerstone for the unfolding of transference dynamics and safe and effective therapy (Langs, 1978), whereas for more humanistic relational modalities, being flexible with the therapeutic frame is important to ensure individual client needs are met (Cooper, 2008; Gold and Cherry, 1997).

Totton takes his argument further by suggesting that rather than seeing two individuals in a room, we need to think of two networks and two ecologies meeting, those of the client and those of the therapist – 'the relationship in question is not just between individuals, but also between worlds' (Totton, 2012, p.259). What happens for instance when a client's ecology of a city (Sean's Belfast) meets the therapist's ecology of rural Devon (Rob's caravan in the woods)? Therapists need to create a

space where we can move back and forth through different registers – the individual, the community, the social, the political and the global. Enabling clients to locate themselves in a wider context and helping them to recognise their inter-connectedness with the more-than-human world is arguably critical at this time.

An eco-psychosocial practice would also see therapists becoming more socially and politically active. A plea from one activist/scholar clearly expresses the need for the therapy profession to become more actively engaged with the CEE:

> *'Psychoanalysts, we need your help. Like preachers in Selma, step off the sidelines. Take your couch out of the office and into the march! Counsel us as you walk beside us. Then offer your unique talents. Shape with us a container for grief, fear, and despair. Let our feelings live there. Help us transform these feelings into fiery action.' (Ornstein, 2022, p.338)*

Action need not necessarily be fiery, but any action can help us to bear the overwhelming feelings that can be evoked by the CEE. Li et al. (2022) argue that mental health professionals have a duty to be leaders of change in our systems. The suggestions they make are compatible with my findings, such as shifting focus from the individual to the social, developing new models of working, educating ourselves and using our professional status to advocate for change in our own communities. Some of these suggestions are relevant for the individual practitioner as part of being more awake to their eco-political selves and that of their clients. In my research therapist Amanda sees herself as being '*in service to the earth'* and Rob was hoping that by supporting his clients to reconnect with the more-than-human world, they will become more environmentally conscious. They are examples of therapists acting as leaders for change. Some suggestions made by Li et al. (2022) are directed towards the profession as a whole and this will be discussed further later in section 8.6.

8.5.3 An eco-psychosocial blueprint? Amanda's approach

Amanda was the only therapist participant who seemed to be working in an eco-psychosocial way and it is useful at this point to focus on her in more detail. This extract from my research journal which I wrote following my first interview with her is a good place to begin as it indicates a particular quality of presence that I experienced:

> *'Amanda spoke about her own and her client's experiences of the natural world in a very moving way and at times it was slow and hypnotic, other worldly. Her language was vivid and beautiful ('our vaster body'). She described a profound experience that she had on the moor whilst doing her psychotherapy training. I felt soothed and entranced whilst listening to her, having felt overwhelmed prior to the interview with my workload. I was quieter (fewer mmm's). I felt myself wanting to work with her and later felt envious of her serenity and groundedness. What felt different was my sense of her power. With other therapist interviews I felt equal or even in a more powerful (i.e. knowledgeable) position whereas with Amanda I felt like an apprentice.'*

What was it about Amanda that conjured this experience? Why did she feel different? One reason was the way she described her understanding of clients' presenting issues:

> *'I don't necessarily hold what brought them in the first place. ... I think whatever people bring in the first place, it's so often about wanting a deeper connection with life. […] It's so often about healing a sense of separation. It's so often about belonging, trusting, grounding in in whatever form it takes that they present it in. And I feel, you know, that is what's happening as these sort of ecological awakenings happen, that there is a healing of relationship […] I do feel that when these sort of insights or similar insights happen for people that the thread goes right back and out in all directions, it touches everything because we are a unity of beings so whatever is brought the healing touches the whole field of what it touches.'*

Amanda seems to be holding a much broader frame in her practice. She told me about a particular client who came to her with '*a deep sense of powerlessness and overwhelm'* regarding the CEE. Through exploring how the client could feel more empowered the client became involved in Friends of the Earth. Amanda said, *'it was great to accompany her through that time and yeah, be alongside as she went through a really deep questioning, made some choices that were well outside of her comfort zone*'. Another client had '*deep concerns'* and '*feelings of powerlessness and terror*' regarding the future and was able to '*share some of that'* with Amanda. I had a sense that Amanda would not shy away from these feelings of powerlessness, and was not afraid to be with uncertainty.

When Amanda spoke about the natural world, she spoke about it as subject rather than object. For instance, she told me about a session with a client outdoors when

they came across a heron in the water. They stopped and watched the heron for some time, talking about its qualities:

> *'I felt that that was some of what you know, Heron was bringing that to that place […] Heron was affecting them. You know, this wasn't random. This wasn't um something that they were making up. They could feel the relationship and the resonance of place and Heron in that place.'*

Amanda referred to the heron as 'Heron', she gave it a personhood. I found myself naturally capitalising its name as I wrote the transcript. I shared this with Amanda in the second interview:

> *'Trudi: I was really struck by your naming of Heron in the story you told about your client […] when I was writing up the transcript, I wrote it with a capital H, like this was his name. He wasn't it wasn't the heron or a heron, it was Heron. [Amanda Yeah]. And that struck me and I just wondered whether you could reflect on that a little bit about the importance of this sense of name that you gave Heron?*
>
> *Amanda: Umm, I love your sensitivity to that, Trudi, I really appreciate the way you picked up on that. Yeah, really lovely […] Um there is an honouring in that. There is an honouring of the um (pause 8 secs) of the agency, though that sounds a little bit cool, but the agency of Heron or the (pause 7 secs) it' not intelligence, but it's, it's, it's more than that as well. Something like…. I'll just run through a number of words that fit them all together…. so agency, intelligence, soul, sovereignty um beingness something like, that recognises a kinship with.'*

In this exchange, I felt as though together we brought Heron into our shared space.

Another factor that contributed to Amanda's difference was that she was active in XR and did not go out of her way to hide this, having XR posters in her windows for instance. It is likely that she attracts clients who wish to talk about the CEE and the posters identify her as a therapist who will be open to this. When pressed to describe herself she reluctantly described herself as an eco-therapist for want of a better label but much preferred to describe her approach as '*a whole earth approach*'. She told me, '*I feel that my life has become in service to the earth. That's what I'm here to do […] I've no idea what the outcome will be but I'm in service to that*'. This is quite a different perspective to the individualised traditional Western approach to psychotherapy. It encompasses both the sense of not knowing and radical hope that I have previously discussed.

Amanda's approach to therapy began following a profound personal experience in a wild natural landscape:

> *'I was very vulnerable, I was very open […] what I saw, what I felt was this immense presence. And it was a presence of love. It was a presence of I am not alone, that was probably one of the main things I felt, I am not alone […] I am being heard. I'm being held. I'm being witnessed. And the the creatureliness of that witnessing, loving, holding, is not taking a human form right now it's in it's in another form. And it it also wasn't something that was out there. It was, you know it was here. I was part of what that presence is. There definitely wasn't an Amanda and moor. It was a, it was a happening and unfolding of um love. It was an unfolding of love and compassion, I think real compassion. Yeah.'*

This experience was hugely significant for Amanda. She said

> *'those experiences really shaped my perception, and my knowing, and the, my sense of self. And so I knew that when I started working with clients, that I would be including, in some way, our vaster body of earth.'*

As we spoke about it in the interview the significance of the experience was further emphasised:

> *'Trudi: The time that you spent on the moor when you were training feels like a, almost like a threshold experience, there was before- the-moor and then after-the-moor. […]*
>
> *Amanda: Great, I love that. That's really helpful. Thank you. Before and after the moor (laughs) I like that. So now I feel quite emotional as I sort of feel into the [Trudi Mmm] Yeah, I'm just gonna pause with this'*

It felt at this point that we entered a shared space, a relational third, where we could conceptualise Amanda's experience as a threshold punctuating her life, a before and after. It is this quality of relating that I am advocating for therapists wishing to work with this kind of material.

Amanda's experience is an intense and deeply transpersonal one, akin to what has been described as an 'oceanic feeling' (the term being coined by Rolland in correspondence with Freud (Freud, 1930)). Amanda experienced a unity with the more-than-human world around her, a dissolving of boundaries ('*I was part of what that presence is. There definitely wasn't an Amanda and moor*'). Freud would view Amanda's experience as regressive, perhaps even pathological, as he outlines in

Civilization and its Discontents (Freud, 1929). He viewed it as the experience of a primitive or underdeveloped ego not yet demarcated from its external world. However, Amanda's experience of unity seems akin to what has been described as the ecological self (Naess, 1989) and could be what helps Amanda to work in a non-dual way, not thinking about inner and outer, action and reflection, but working from an in-between eco-psychosocial space where everything is interconnected ('*the thread goes right back and out in all directions, it touches everything because we are a unity of beings so whatever is brought the healing touches the whole field of what it touches').* I am sure this quality of Amanda's presence, a kind of charisma, will be experienced by her clients.

In summary, revisioning activism and therapy as eco-psychosocial practices is more than simply adding an ecological lens to therapy or a therapeutic lens to activism. Such a simplistic approach does not dispense with the duality of inner and outer, which can be seen to reflect the dualism of society and nature. Therapy could explore more deeply the relationship between our personal histories and inner world and the way in which we are meeting and responding to the CEE. Activists could spend time examining their inner worlds to understand where they are coming from when they act so that unconscious patterns are not replayed through their activism. Understanding themselves could help activists choose the form of activism that best reflects their strengths and avoid those which perhaps plays into historical wounds and destructive patterns, thereby leading to a more sustainable activism (Hoggett and Randall, 2016).

8.6 Support from professional bodies and training organisations

The therapists I interviewed did not seem well equipped to know how and when to explore this material and more support will be needed from professional bodies and training organisations.

8.6.1 Professional bodies

There is an increasing professionalisation of therapy practice driven by a broader political culture of hyper-rationality and managerialism born of neoliberalism (Dalal, 2018). It is argued that one consequence of neoliberalism is the displacement of anxiety regarding the human and environmental costs of a deregulated market

economy (Weintrobe, 2020; Randall, 2005) by specifying, measuring and monitoring 'all aspects of performance' in the public sphere (Hoggett, 2013, p.66). This has led to difficulties for therapy practitioners. Firstly, the surveillance required by a professional body of its members creates stresses leading to defences and neuroses. This can go part way to explaining the finding that participants held rigidly to the therapeutic contract rather than opening up any side-mentions regarding broader sociopolitical issues such as the CEE. Anxiety about being seen to work professionally could lead to an unhelpful adherence to therapeutic contracts, goals and outcomes. Therapists, whether working in private practice or in organisations, may feel the need to protect their income, jobs and/or status, as well as the safety of their clients. There is, therefore, a pressure to follow the rules, something clearly expressed by Nellie who worked in an IAPT service and feels a '*performance pressure'*. The pressure for therapists to perform is a consequence of the way in which IAPT providers have to operate. They are paid based on their performance measured as the number of patients seen and their degree of improvement. Nellie has to work in a very '*narrow'* way in order to meet these organisational goals.

This culture of surveillance is also present in private practice, evident in Lee's comment that she does not '*want to be directive or leading*' and that she is *'not that kind of therapist'*. This kind of managerialism closes down the therapist's thinking and questioning (Dalal, 2018); a kind of deadening of curiosity. A curious transcription error occurred in Nellie's AI generated transcript, where 'IAPT' was transcribed as 'eye out'. As I read it, I associated to the third eye chakra believed to be responsible for intuition and increased perception in many Eastern traditions. I imagined it being removed by the narrow culture of managerialism present in organisations such as IAPT. It is no wonder side-mentions about the CEE are not explored.

There is an underlying anxiety to be seen as ethical and professional as judged by peers (including me in the context of the interviews), by supervisors and by professional bodies. Nellie's fear of being considered '*an oddity'* by the rest of her team for seeing the importance of the more-than-human world in her work reflects this. There exists an 'internalised establishment' (Hoggett, 2022, p.17) in each individual therapist that requires rules to be followed. The 'conspiracy of silence' (Zerubavel, 2006, p.48) that ensures the CEE is not explored exists between client

and therapist and then between therapist and supervisor, thereby increasing the strength of the conspiracy – two people plus a bystander (Zerubavel, 2006). The strength of the conspiracy would increase massively if a whole professional community tacitly agree to *only* notice and talk about the personal and to remain incurious about the impact of the sociopolitical on our clients. I argue that we have a duty to make sociopolitical issues such as the CEE part of our discourse amongst our professional groups and with our clients.

However, professional practice guidelines present those of us who are more aware of climate aware with difficult questions. How do we ensure we are not 'that kind of therapist' who imposes our own agenda onto the client and at the same time remain open for cues that the client may be ready to begin exploring their eco-distress? When and for whom is it therapeutically beneficial to hold the boundaries that keep the CEE out of the work, and conversely when and for whom should the boundaries be softened to allow the CEE into the room? Working within each client's window of tolerance (Siegel, 1999) is crucial for safe practice. Additionally, moving between the inner and outer worlds of the client, disentangling the complexity of their distress, and developing an understanding of how inner and outer influences each other, is key to a more permeable eco-psychosocial way of working. Professional bodies will be influenced by the fundamental assumptions underlying the different psychotherapeutic modalities they represent but will need to consider this as their ethical practice guidelines evolve.

There is a case for the expansion of the role of professional bodies beyond the individual therapist to engage at policy and systems level. As has already been highlighted mental health professionals, based on figures for the increasing mental health problems associated with the CEE, have declared that 'the climate emergency is a mental health emergency' (Lawrance et al., 2022). It is incumbent, therefore, on our professional bodies alongside others such as the medical professions, to lobby government for funding and resources to ensure we have support in place for those affected physically and mentally by the CEE. As well as ensuring we work ethically with our clients, we should also remember our wider ethical and moral responsibilities to humanity and the planet.

8.6.2 Training

Totton notes the way in which therapist trainings lead trainees to ascribe everything to internal factors (Totton, 2011). This was most apparent in Helen's experience of her therapist interpreting her grief associated with the CEE to be a manifestation of her grief for her absent mother. This does not mean that the two perspectives are mutually exclusive. Drawing on Kassouf's concept of traumatised sensibility, Helen's grief regarding the CEE could well have been a result of a sensitivity caused by the absence of her mother as she was growing up. The important thing is that her distress is not *solely* ascribed to internal factors. The two experiences could be amplifying each other and working with both inner and outer would allow such a relationship to be understood. A purely internal focus means the wider sociopolitical causes of distress remain unexplored and an opportunity for both therapist and client to become engaged with both problems is missed.

Training organisations could do more to support us to feel confident in stepping beyond the narrow intra and inter-personal fields of exploration with clients. From a social practice perspective, this would involve facilitating the 'materials, meanings and competencies' (Adams, 2016, p.78) required for an eco-psychosocial approach to therapy. This means unpacking how, where and for whom therapy is conducted, what it means to offer therapy and what skills are needed to work in this broader way at this time. The lack of confidence amongst therapists and the subsequent need for training to be provided has been highlighted by other authors and practitioners (Croasdale et al., 2023; Li et al., 2022; Mowat, 2022; Aspey, 2021). Nellie clearly expressed the current lack of training available when she said,

> *'it's very marginal to most training, certainly the training I've done, the relational developmental model is very much about your intra and interpersonal connections, relationships, and the you know, it kind of really ended there'*

Trainee therapists do not routinely receive theoretical or experiential training in how to work with eco-distress. My research suggests that therapists care and are concerned about the CEE but do not know how to work with eco-distress and what their role could be in relation to the problem. Many rely on general strategies for working with anxiety and grief. I would argue that working with eco-distress is different because the therapist is exposed to the same ecological trauma and is embedded in the same system as the client; both are vulnerable. As a result, it is not

surprising that many of us do not recognise, or unconsciously disavow, the side-mention cues that eco-distress may be present. Psychotherapy and counselling professions have begun to recognise the need to attend to eco-distress. UKCP's ex-CEO, Professor Niblock was recently quoted in the organisation's journal saying 'By virtue of the sheer depth and duration of UKCP training, and exacting standards, our registrants are ideally placed to help individuals [with eco-anxiety]' (Scott, 2022). Although not all the therapists in my sample were UKCP registered, my findings suggest few therapists are currently 'ideally placed'.

Although more training is being provided in the form of CPD there is a risk that this is superficial and defensive, merely providing information regarding eco-distress and offering strategies to sooth anxiety; we need to move beyond a theoretical understanding to develop a praxis. CPD is needed that supports us to go much deeper into our own feelings about the CEE so that we can subsequently endure feelings of powerlessness and hopelessness alongside our clients whilst at the same time allowing a creative process to take place. Taking part in experiential practices such as grief-tending, climate cafes or The Work That Reconnects (Macy and Young Brown, 1998), may be much more supportive and useful for therapists who wish to work deeply with their clients in this regard (Hamilton, 2019). Processing our own feelings about the CEE with others, for example in training groups, in supervision, in experiential groups or with a 'climate buddy' (Allured, 2022, p.342), will help us to learn how to talk about the CEE with our clients. By experiencing and processing the intensity and limits of our own responses, by recognising our own defences, we will be become familiar and more comfortable with the emotional landscape of eco-distress. This ultimately will help us to hold and contain the client in their feelings. The Climate Psychology Alliance has been instrumental in developing resources and supportive spaces for therapists to explore their personal experiences as well as their clinical practice in relation to the CEE (Tait et al., 2022).

8.6.3 Group and community-based models

Many of our therapy frameworks derive from our individualistic culture concerned as it is with the self, personal problems and relationships. The CEE is a collective problem on a global scale. It needs a 'collective container for collective healing' (Bednarek, 2021, p.26) and as such presents a challenge to current ways of thinking and working. There is little scope in our current therapy models for a collective lens;

these models, therefore, need updating if they are to work effectively with problems related to the CEE. Perhaps working with the psychological and emotional effects of the CEE may be too big for a single therapist to adequately contain and a different therapeutic model is needed that is better fit for purpose. Gillespie (2019) argues for 'spaces for open dialogues, both formal and informal, which encompass and proceed beyond the old binaries of inner/personal/individual life and outer/social/collective life' (Gillespie, 2019, p.124). Such spaces could tap into a distributed intelligence which resides within the system rather than relying on expert knowledge held by a therapist.

Community-based models based on group working that have been developed to support people with emotional responses to the CEE such 'The Work that Reconnects' (Macy and Young Brown, 1998), 'Living with the climate crisis' (Living with the climate crisis, 2023) and 'Active Hope' (Macy and Johnstone, 2012) have been shown to lead to a deeper engagement with the issues and can support people to take action (Buchs et al., 2015). However, they also point to the importance of skilled facilitators. These collective models need to be recognised by professional bodies and brought into the mainstream and there may be resistance to this idea. The therapist community may find it difficult to let go of their expert status.

8.6.4 Societal expectations

Finally, Totton points to the expectations that society has of therapists, namely to solve the symptoms of deeply seated social problems without dealing with the causes, 'Make us better, without rocking the boat' (Totton, 2006, p.116). This unconscious social demand to make us better without rocking the boat can lead the therapist to attempt to soothe the client's eco-distress through suggestions such as not listening to the news (Sarah, Lee) or spending more time in nature (Sarah, Lee, Nellie, Jenny). In private practice the dependency on the client for income adds further anxiety for therapists that can contribute to the avoidance of material which may disrupt a comfortable equilibrium within the dyad (Hirsch, 2008). In Benjamin's terms the dynamic becomes one of harmonious complementarity or pseudo-mutuality (Benjamin, 2009, 2004). This is understandable since it is not only the client that can be rocked by exploring feelings associated with the CEE. In my study, therapists were also defended against their feelings in this regard. To play with the metaphor of rocking the boat, both therapist and client are in the same boat – the

reality of the CEE – neither wishing to be rocked too much. However, this collusion with keeping the focus at an individual level and framing eco-distress as a symptom to be soothed, maintains a sense of our powerlessness in the face of societal and political problems. This then perpetuates the individualisation of the climate crisis in our Western culture, placing blame and responsibility for action on the shoulders of individuals. This can be seen in the narratives of my participants as they tell me about their pro-environmental actions, letting me know they are doing their bit, they are acting as responsible citizens. Activists unsurprisingly were more cognisant of the need for political and system change.

As well as the societal expectation of solving the problem without rocking the boat, therapists are also expected to solve the problem quickly. Within organisations offering therapy services this is most acutely felt as a restriction on the number of sessions available per client and the focus on outcome measures. Even within private practice, however, clients are often restricted by financial and time constraints. What I am suggesting in this chapter takes time, however. It takes time for therapists to work with their own feelings and defences to the CEE. It takes time to slow things down in a session, to stay with not knowing rather than reach for fixes and explore a side-mention a client may make. At the same time, we are in a climate and ecological emergency – a code red for humanity – which calls for urgent action. We somehow have to hold the tension of both.

Summary

Therapy could have an important role to play in these times of the CEE but will need to work more eco-psychosocially. It could support people to live with the reality of the CEE and the difficult feelings it evokes by providing the containment and safety to process them. It could act as a bridge to support people to connect with their agency and to act for change, thereby countering feelings of powerlessness and hopelessness. It could help activists to develop more sustainable practices by facilitating a deeper understanding of the links between their personal biographies and their activism.

In order to be able to work in this way, therapists need to engage with the CEE on a personal level, to process their own feelings and manage the individual and social defences that are a barrier to this. As the reality of the CEE continues to make itself

felt, we are all likely to emerge from our climate bubble (Weintrobe, 2021) and experience significant shock. We are likely to feel vulnerable, angry, traumatised, ashamed, afraid and so on. This background collective dis-ease will be the context in which we are working and we will need the support of colleagues, supervisors, organisations and professional bodies to adapt and navigate these waters.

In the next and final chapter I reflect on the process of this research project, draw together the insights from this study in relation to my overarching research questions and outline how they have contributed to the field of climate psychology.

Chapter 9 – Conclusion: Reflections, Contributions, Limitations and Future Research

Introduction

In this final chapter I conclude by drawing together my findings, reflections and discussion. In section 9.1 'Reflections on the research process' I first describe the impact the interviews had on the participants and myself in order to further explain my conclusions. Secondly, I discuss my own defendedness as a researcher to illustrate the complex and multiple levels at which feelings and defences operate in psychosocial research and in relation to the CEE in particular. Thirdly, I discuss the tensions I experienced working with my multiple identities and how this helped to clarify my personal agenda for embarking on this project. In section 9.2 'Answering my research questions' I outline to what extent I have been able to answer my research questions and in section 9.3 'Contributions to the field' I discuss the contributions I have been able to make to the field of climate psychology as a result. In section 9.4 'Alternative viewpoints' I offer some alternative perspectives to my interpretations and in section 9.5 'Limitations of the study and further research' I discuss the limitations of the study and make suggestions for further research.

9.1 Reflections on the research process

'At the heart of the project is the reflexive practitioner'

Clarke and Hoggett, 2009, p.7

A direct critique of FANI and BNIM has already been made in Chapter 4, section 4.7 together with reflections on using these methods online. In this section I describe how my experience of the research process has contributed to my interpretations and subsequent discussion.

9.1.1 Impact of the interviews on participants

9.1.1.1 Client participants

As mentioned in Chapter 5, section 5.3.5, many of the client participants expressed being interviewed as a positive experience.

> *'I've enjoyed it immensely, and much more than I thought I would. I wasn't sure what to expect. I thought you might be a bit hippy. It's been wonderful talking to you. It really has' (Martin)*

> *'Absolutely awesome, you know, really, I've really enjoyed it. It's like it's actually made me realise I haven't thought about it enough, […] I haven't given it enough of my attention' (Sean)*
>
> *'it was quite interesting that the conversation that we had made me think I used to have more passion in me about certain things, […] and the things that I could do differently, but I think it's also being prepared to challenge and question and stand up for what I believe in, rather than being be more passive' (Phil)*
>
> *'Well, quite challenging actually […] it took a bit of unravelling' (Margaret)*
>
> *'[I] definitely was thinking a lot about my horse since you and I spoke and thinking it was really nice to be asked about that because I don't really talk about her with anyone' (Deborah)*

It seems the interviews opened a door for Martin and Sean to spend time reflecting a bit more on their relationship with nature and perhaps on the issues of the CEE. Martin emailed me twice following the interviews. The first in response to my thank you email he said, *'I enjoyed answering your questions which provoked deep insights into my psyche on the subject of nature'*. He then emailed me again a couple of months later to tell me he was reading a book, '*C.G.Jung on Nature, Technology and Modern Life'*. The reflections clearly continued for some time after the interviews.

For Phil, it seems to have connected him to a sense of agency – '*things I could do differently'* and '*stand up for what I believe in rather than being passive'*. For Margaret the interviews seem to have provided a space for doing some emotional work – '*it took a bit of unravelling'.* For both of these participants the interview acted rather like a therapeutic space. Deborah was grateful for the space to talk about her relationship with her horse who was so important to her.

Elaine had more of an ambivalent experience of the interviews. She ended the first interview by saying, '*the bigger picture I find terrifying*'. She began the second interview by asking whether we could cut the interview short as she was feeling unwell. I wondered whether the first interview had stirred up some difficult feelings. When I asked her whether she had had any reflections since we last spoke she said:

> *'Um, I've been thinking about them quite a bit. […] The only thing that woke me up, though was one of the questions you asked, or might have just been one of my responses when I said about the climate crisis, and everything else was just too big for me to comprehend. And I've been thinking about that a lot […] I just, I*

don't know where to start…not even you know small things that I could personally do don't seem to, you sort of think well, is it worth it? I mean, obviously, you know, it is. But is it gonna make the slightest bit of difference?'

I asked Elaine how she felt about these thoughts. She said:

'It's, it's quite depressing, actually. […] this made me feel powerless [..] not just insignificant. Yeah, powerless.'

However, when I asked her at the end about her experience of the interviews she said:

Elaine: 'It's been, it's been good. I've actually enjoyed, again, the journey. And it's made me think of things and remember things that I had forgotten, and I hadn't made the connections. So that's been really pleasant. And yes, I've not found any part of it, apart from, like, I say, the big picture bit uncomfortable or anything like that. It's all been quite, well quite spiritual really.

Trudi: And what, what particular connections are you pleased that you've made?

Elaine: Well some of the ones with, especially the trees, and how much a part of my life, they have been at different stages'

Elaine seemed to be oscillating between connecting with her sadness, fear about the future and powerlessness, and then distancing herself from the feelings by reflecting on positive memories. It also seems to have revitalised her connection with trees. This supports the idea that feelings oscillate and fluctuate (Crociani-Windland and Hoggett, 2012) and in relation to the climate crisis people oscillate between feelings and defences (Pihkala, 2022).

9.1.1.2 Therapist participants

There was also an impact on therapist participants. It made Jenny question her avoidance of opening up side-mentions. She began the second interview by saying:

'I was interested in the question around, you know, how far or not do you pursue, you know, the those kinds of issues about the natural world when clients bring them up. And I don't know, I haven't really come to conclusions about it. [Trudi uh huh] but it's definitely made me somehow a little bit more aware of, you know, umm, somehow more conscious of that that might be something that could be pursued a little more […]and it's a really interesting question about how far I guess all of us really engage with that'

Jenny seemed to be reflecting on this as a therapist but also from her own personal perspective – '*how far I guess all of us really engage with that*'. She told me at the end of the second interview, '*it did provoke quite a lot of reflection for me'*.

The interviews had a significant impact on Nellie who was working in an IAPT service, making her consider whether she wanted to resign from her job.

> *'you've done quite a lot to stir me up. I was thinking about this before but I've actually spoken now about leaving my NHS role early in the new year, because I do want to give myself some time to work in this more integrated way […] So I'm not saying this is all down to your (laughs) research project, it was kind of going on, but I think it's brought a lot of these questions er much more into the foreground for me, of what what am I doing? What is my model? Why aren't I bringing this into my work more? Can I bring it in or is it really not possible in that setting?'*

The interviews crystalised her already present reservations regarding the narrowness of her IAPT work.

9.1.1.3 Activist participants

For activist participants, the interviews created a space for reflection, allowing thoughts, feelings and connections to be made. As suggested in activist literature, this may have been an uncommon experience for some of the participants. For instance, Luke said the interview had been '*more emotional than [he] had anticipated*' and Simon said, '*I've become more aware of how I sidestep quite a lot of those feelings in order to, to for this sense of cohesion to be there*'.

Donna said,

> *'I have friends who are in the same boat and feel, and what we do have conversations about it. It's quite different being asked questions. It's really well, it's it's brought a lot up as well that that maybe I haven't thought about for a while.'*

This suggests that the interview process is different to having a conversation with friends. Donna went on to say at the end of the second interview,

> *'some of the things that came out of my mouth, I didn't know they were in there. The judicious asking of questions brought stuff to the forefront or brought stuff into expression that perhaps was I was holding somewhere But I didn't, I wasn't really conscious of.'*

The questions act as specific prompts for a particular kind of material, the quality of listening is also likely to be different and the reflexive relating style I employed encouraged a deepening of awareness.

For Stephen the interview prompted him to explore further. Talking with me had '*opened up the idea of grief and trauma'* which he had followed up by reading '*Active Hope*' by Joanna Macy and Chris Johnstone. For Bob, the interview left him with a question, '*I understand what's happening. What I don't understand is why I'm doing so little about it. It's brought that into focus*'.

9.1.1.4 Summary of impact on participants

The interviews performed more than a data collection function and this has been recognised in psychosocial research. Hoggett et al. (2010, p.183) proposed that 'the research interview can be a recognition-producing exercise in which the respondent has the experience of "… being understood"' and Williams (2021) says, 'research can be a form of social action occurring in the overlapping life fields of researchers and participants' (Williams, 2021, p.172). I think both these assertions are true in the case of my study. Additionally, the interviews seemed to open up a 'third space' for exploration of uncertainties, ambiguities and co-creation of meanings. The impact of the interviews on participants has led me to argue that therapy could be a potentially helpful space for people to explore feelings regarding the CEE that may be below-the-surface.

9.1.2 A defended researcher

At different stages of the research process, the study has brought me into contact with my own feelings and defences regarding the CEE. Sometimes it was clear to me how the process was impacting me, at other times it only became apparent on reflection. Throughout the project there appeared numerous parallel processes which seemed to confirm my interpretations and informed my discussion and conclusions.

9.1.2.1 Pre-interview stage

The COVID-19 pandemic occurred as I was about to begin my interviews. I had to choose between suspending my PhD or adapting my method to online interviewing. I chose the latter. In my journal I wrote,

> *'Is my decision to continue rather than suspend until such time as we can revert to face-to-face gratifying my infantile needs or*

avoiding mourning the loss of my project? I have found the prospect of suspension difficult to accept.'

This makes me think of the parallel with the decisions we currently face with the CEE. Continuing with 'business as usual' enables us to both meet our infantile needs and avoid mourning our losses. The connection between the pandemic and the CEE has been made by several authors (Hollway et al., 2022; Dodds, 2020) and I have discussed this in relation to my findings in Chapter 7, section 7.2.1.

During the recruitment of participants, I initially contacted my own professional networks and contacts for volunteers. In my research journal, I wrote *'Am I looking for short cuts and easy wins?'* There is a parallel with how we are trying to find quick wins to the climate crisis rather than making the much more difficult and significant changes needed. I also wrote *'the data collection seems very serious and little more intimidating'* – again, I can see the parallels with finding the subject of the CEE serious and intimidating. Reading about the subject as I began my PhD allowed me some emotional distance but engaging with real people and their experiencing was likely to bring me closer to my own emotional responses.

9.1.2.2 Interviews

There were many occasions during the interviewing phase when I recognised my position as a defended researcher. Some of these are discussed in the findings, Chapters 5 and 6. There are others that are worth a further mention here. When interviewing client participants, I sometimes struggled when asking the question, 'What are your thoughts and feelings regarding climate change and environmental problems?' I stumbled, repeated words, sometimes changing the phrasing slightly. My journal notes record that *'It felt clunky'* and that at least one participant had to clarify what I meant. My awkwardness suggests I am defended, perhaps even apologetic for asking a question that could be upsetting. I am defending myself from the participant's distress and hence my own. Perhaps therapists who do not proactively explore the CEE with clients are similarly avoiding causing climate-distress to clients.

After the second interview with Jenny, I wrote, *'My questions didn't seem to elicit very much more. Almost like I had already bled her dry, trying to squeeze the last drop out'*. This makes me think of our extractive relationship with the natural world. Am I acting out my part in that culture in the interview context? Similarly, following

my second interview with Lee, I wrote, *'My disappointment that nothing amazing or outstanding has emerged. Just more of the same. Where is the new knowledge?'*. Although my responses could have signified having reached different types of data saturation (Saunders et al., 2017), it is also possible that my anxiety about obtaining 'outstanding' data and 'new knowledge' has parallels with my anxiety regarding finding solutions for the CEE. Am I displacing this anxiety onto the interview situation?

Although I occasionally had a strong emotional response during an interview, for example when Jenny told me about the feather and the egg (see Chapter 5, section 5.4.1.1), it was more usual for me to feel detached during the interviews. Instead, I would experience emotional responses later, as indicated by this extract whilst transcribing an interview recording:

> *'I sit at my desk working and the sound of the rain lashing against the window again draws my attention away from my computer screen. May is set to be one of the wettest on record. I find myself crying, holding my head in my hands. This is it isn't it, climate change. We can never be sure of anything ever again. We can never rely on Spring being Spring, on plants growing, of insects pollenating, of food being produced. The grief and fear crash over me like a wave.'*

My feelings would also emerge in my dreams during this phase. Common themes of my dreams were: trapped and caged animals; extreme weather; running out of time. The connection between these themes and the CEE are clear.

9.1.2.3 Analysis

The analysis phase was long and iterative requiring a deep immersion in the data and with my own responses to it. These extracts illustrate the ways in which I was defended:

> *'I have been looking at past PhD theses and am very impressed with X's thesis particularly the ongoing personal reflection; she brings herself into the research. I note that I feel distanced from the data - looking at it objectively'*
>
> *'I have been able to represent the themes and sub-themes and their relationship to one another diagrammatically. I feel quite excited by this! But am I trying to make it too neat? What about the messiness and contradictions?'*

My anxiety about the messiness and complexity of the CEE is displaced onto my research, it drives me to want to fix things in place, to develop a concrete and tangible 'answer' rather than stay with uncertainty and ambiguity which is inherent in the problem of the CEE.

During the coding phase, I initially coded comments by participants that indicated an awareness of the CEE as 'unconscious feelings'. On further analysis, however, I could see clearly expressed feelings. I, therefore, recoded them as 'the truth is out there'. In my initial coding of 'unconscious feelings' I had rendered the feelings as not 'out there', when in fact they were clearly present in the data, I was just not seeing them clearly. I was myself unconsciously defended.

My sense of powerlessness and hopelessness in the face of the task, both the research and the CEE, is apparent in this extract:

> *'I haven't looked at my PhD for a month. I'm finding it more difficult to focus. I am receiving so much information about the CEE I don't know how to involve myself. I feel overwhelmed. Where should I invest my energy? Is my PhD enough? Should I be doing more? Am I just kidding myself that I'm making a difference?'*

Following an email exchange with my supervisor where I mentioned that I felt isolated at not being able to visit the campus due to lockdown restrictions, I felt 'brushed off' and 'dismissed'. I reflected on this as a transference process. Clearly my supervisor was also having to deal with the impact of the pandemic and probably was not able to provide as much support as usual. She may also have been responding appropriately given the stage I was at with my research. Whatever the reason(s), my need to be soothed was unmet and I was left *'upset and disappointed'* (much as I was as a child with my mother.) However, there could also have been a parallel process. Engaging emotionally with the CEE can be a lonely experience, as can being a PhD student especially during a pandemic. My supervisor invited me to reflect with her on what had happened and this helped us both to make sense of the event. We were able to work reflexively with the parallel process. The whole experience reinforces the importance of reflexivity when working with difficult material and it made me wonder whether clients might feel similarly missed if their therapist does not pick up and explore side-mentions they have made about the CEE.

9.1.2.4 Writing up

During this phase which was actually continuous throughout the project, there was a constant sense of urgency and a feeling of being 'too late'. This has strong parallels with the CEE where scientists are telling us that we are indeed too late to avoid some inevitable and irreversible changes to our climate and environment.

When writing the discussion chapters my early drafts were particularly critical of the therapy profession. I see this as a projection of my own passivity as a therapist regarding the CEE and as mobilisation of my activist identity that wanted social change (see below, section 9.1.3). I was also anxious of how my criticisms and conclusions may be received by colleagues and peers. This feels akin to how activists may feel, particularly in the current political climate where they are demonised by the current government and some mainstream media. Discussion with supervisors and colleagues helped to take a more measured view.

9.1.2.5 Summary

Reflections on my own feelings and defendedness add weight to my findings and interpretations that feelings were below-the-surface for my participants and the way in which they were also defended. It underlines the fact that we are all figuratively swimming in the same sea, we are all part of the same sociopolitical context that constitutes the CEE – 'the backdrop of this "social third"' (Benjamin, 2012, p.49). Drawing further on Benjamin (2012), my own self-recognition is essential because I am struggling with the same thing as my participants. My breakthrough in self-understanding was essential for a breakthrough in the data.

9.1.3 Multiple identities

Holding multiple identities, therapist, supervisor, researcher and activist, was a challenge for me that sometimes created slippage in different contexts, some of which I have already noted in the findings, Chapters 5 and 6. I add some additional reflections in this section.

When working as a therapist in my own practice, I needed to keep my researcher in check and not view the session as 'data'. I needed a different quality of curiosity to that of a researcher. For instance, one of my clients spoke about his concerns regarding the CEE in a session for the first time. I wrote in my research journal:

> *'G began to talk about feeling stressed about climate change. I remember feeling excited and fearful. These two emotions originate from my simultaneously held roles – therapist and researcher. As a researcher, G was presenting me with the kind of material I was asking my participants about. I began to wish I could ask G to be a participant in my research. I wondered if I could use the material in some way. As a therapist, I was deeply empathic with his distress. I felt moved with tears close at hand. I wanted to hold him in his distress.'*

Similarly, when interviewing participants, I needed to keep my therapist in check. I had to be careful not to slip into making therapeutic interventions that could intrude too much into the participant's inner world, especially with activists. With client participants, I did not want to disrupt their therapy. I did not want to push any participant deeper into material that could not then be subsequently worked safely with. Some participants pushed me into my therapist identity more than others. For instance, Margaret who was an ex-client of mine from several years ago, was difficult to interview for this reason and my research journal notes following the first interview say, '*the interview quickly morphed into a therapy session'* with Margaret telling me all about her difficult childhood, again.

With therapist participants it was easy to slip into collegiate-style relating, for instance after interviewing Rob I wrote, '*I felt as if I was agreeing with everything Rob was saying'*. My analytical researcher seemed to go off duty at times and I found myself having a comfortable chat with a colleague. Conversely, sometimes I wanted to engage in a more challenging supervisory style of relating with the participant. I wanted to ask, 'what do you think is going on here?' or 'what would it be like to do it differently?'.

The tension between my different identities is likely to have existed before I embarked on the PhD and was amplified as I grappled with questions such as what is my part in working for change? Is my PhD really activism behind a veneer of research? (Bhopal, 2023). Can one be an activist by being a therapist? As I have already mentioned, my critique of the profession at times was harsh and could be seen as pushing therapy beyond what it can or should do. My concern that activists were not exploring their feelings deeply enough could be seen as pushing for affect when it might not be helpful. It seems the splitting I described in my findings and further discussed in Chapter 7 occurred for me too. As therapist and client

participants split off the sociopolitical I took the opposite position in the binary, the outer, and my activist was mobilised. The reverse happened with activists. As their inner world was split off my therapist was mobilised and I occupied the inner position of the binary. My experience demonstrates how strong and unconscious the splitting and projection dynamic can be and it is likely to be operating in the different contexts of therapy and activism as I have argued.

9.1.4 Final reflections on methods

The interviews seemed to have served a purpose for myself and the participants other than just data collection. They have stimulated reflection, offered a transitional space and a third vantage point from which to explore the complex and emotionally difficult subject of the CEE. They have supported a move towards change for some – increased reading and engaging with the subject, a change of roles, a questioning of practice, a reconnection with forgotten elements of self and a recognition of agency. This supports the argument that engaging in a relational and dialogic way with concerns about the CEE can be very helpful and productive.

The research approach taken involves huge complexity and risks creating confusion rather than clarity as Frosh points out, '…a policy of multiplicity, which might be adopted on a principled basis, creates its own incoherence' (Frosh, 2003, p.1562). Certainly, the time-consuming nature of the analysis and difficulty expressing a coherent narrative when working with many levels of data was taxing. Reflexive work is difficult because it is profoundly personal bringing another level of investment into the research work. Yet another parallel is apparent. Engaging with the CEE in any context is similarly likely to be messy, complex, confusing, contradictory and emotionally taxing.

As an experienced psychotherapist I found reflexivity a natural process, rather like having an internal supervisor. However, as I was working alone for much of the time, I was aware of the risk of imposing my own subjectivity on the data, a form of 'wild analysis' (Clarke and Hoggett, 2009). It was not always easy to organise research panels and ideally I would have liked to have several more. I had to be creative in finding ways to explore the data with others such as using clinical peer supervision groups and work colleagues. This can be seen as yet another parallel; the need for the group in both activism and psychosocial research, although it fulfils different

functions. For activists the group provides a sense of belonging and comfort and in psychosocial research it acts as a check against over-subjective interpretation.

9.2 Answering my research questions

To recap my research questions guiding this study were:

1. How are feelings regarding the CEE experienced in therapy and activism? Where are the similarities, differences and gaps?
2. What unconscious defences are employed in therapy and activism to manage difficult feelings? In what way are they helpful or unhelpful?
3. Are the current models, contexts and tools of therapy relevant for supporting individuals to deal with the emotional impact of the CEE? What else is helpful?
4. What do we understand about the task of therapy and activism in these times?

I will address the first and second questions as a pair as they are interconnected.

9.2.1 How are feelings regarding the CEE experienced in therapy and activism? Where are the similarities, differences and gaps? What unconscious defences are employed in therapy and activism to manage difficult feelings? In what way are they helpful or unhelpful?

My study suggests that although the natural and more-than-human world is frequently talked about in therapy and considered to be valuable, feelings regarding the CEE are more likely to enter therapy as side-mentions. It is also likely that such side-mentions may not to be explored further by therapists and instead be seen as small talk. The therapists in my study reported seeing these side-mentions as peripheral to the therapeutic task and the clients acknowledged that they did not push their concerns further, perceiving the task of therapy to be about 'little stuff' of personal problems. Therefore, an implicit unconscious collusion can occur between therapist and client regarding what therapy is for such that concerns about the CEE are split off from the presenting issues or from the valuing of nature.

Defences of splitting, projection, avoidance and distancing were observed, and this supports the more theoretical literature on defences against eco-distress. Although these defences can be helpful ensuring that the individual is not overwhelmed, if not worked with they can act as a barrier to meaningful engagement with the problem of the CEE and a lack of connection to personal agency.

When given the explicit permission to talk about their feelings regarding the CEE during the interview, both clients and therapists were willing to explore these further, and a range of feelings were apparent – grief, fear, guilt, anger and powerlessness – which supports the literature discussed in Chapter 3. Sometimes these were expressed directly and at other times were beneath-the-surface and inferred from my interpretations and countertransference. During the interviews participants oscillated between different feelings and between feelings and defences as they reached the edges of what they felt able to tolerate in that moment. This suggests that such feelings will be in the field during therapeutic work and possibly only just beneath-the-surface. By offering sufficient containment therapists could support clients to explore these more safely leading to relief and ultimately a connection with personal agency.

My study indicates that therapists' feelings about the CEE are often kept out of awareness during therapy sessions through conscious and unconscious defences. Anxiety about being overwhelmed by their own feelings and of having to be strong and hold it together for the client is one reason why therapists may avoid opening up conversations about the topic. Social defences also seem to restrict the frame through the adherence to ethical and professional guidelines regarding sticking with the therapeutic contract. Additionally, organisational goals and targets can act to direct the therapy.

The differences between therapists in my sample suggests that some therapists are more defended than others regarding the emotional impact of the CEE and may need to do more work of their own before they are able to offer such containment (see next section). It may be that certain modalities are more suited to working with this material.

In my activist sample, feelings about the CEE were acknowledged and participants seemed to experience a transformation as distress was channelled into action and feelings became more positive. Participants reported feeling empowered, excited and comforted. Anger was given a tangible object for discharge and amends could be made for feelings of guilt. These findings suggest that engaging in activism can offer the containment and a creative transitional space that may be missing from more traditional therapy contexts. However, there may be a reluctance by activists to

explore feelings, preferring instead to remain focussed on action. This can be useful as it ensures that the activist is not overwhelmed by feelings at a dangerous or inopportune time but it may also risk activist burnout and/or a lack of awareness of the drivers for their action. The differences in my activist sample further suggest that the culture of the activist group is relevant as some groups are more likely to allow space for reflection and transformation of feelings than others.

In summary, my findings suggest that feelings regarding the CEE are not often explicitly taken to therapy and in activism action tends to be prioritised over feelings. In therapy the focus is on the individual – the 'little stuff' – whereas in activism the focus is on the outer world and action. There appears to be a gap in terms of bringing inner and outer together in each context.

9.2.2 Are the current models, contexts and tools of therapy relevant for supporting individuals to deal with the emotional impact of the CEE? What else is helpful?

My findings suggest that in its most traditional form, with a focus on the personal issues of the individual, therapy does not allow a wide enough frame for eco-distress to be worked with effectively. It seems that most therapists will deal with eco-distress in a generalised way rather than seeking to understand the interconnection between an individual's personal history and the way in which the CEE is impacting them. Many therapists are likely to be defended themselves and will avoid opening up the topic for fear of their own feelings becoming difficult to manage. They are also likely to experience feelings of powerlessness in being able to help their client as well as in the face of the CEE itself. I argue that in order for therapists to feel confident in working with eco-distress and to be curious about side-mentions regarding the natural world they need to work with their own feelings about the CEE. My own reflexive work during this project (see section 9.1 above) shows how personal breakthroughs in understanding are crucial for being able to then work at depth with material being presented.

If a client does talk about the CEE more directly, therapists who have not done their own work around the topic are more likely to attempt to soothe themselves and the client by suggesting ways to manage the distress before a deeper understanding can be reached. Strategies such as limiting exposure to climate news and spending time in nature are important ways for managing eco-distress. However, without a deeper

understanding of the relationship between the client's inner personal world and the impact of outer sociopolitical concerns such as the CEE, the opportunity for an appropriate engagement with agency, personal change and action is lost.

When working with clients who have become engaged in activism of some kind, therapists may similarly offer strategies for self-care rather than exploring the meaning of the activism for that individual and the connection between their personal biography and their activism. Such an understanding could lead to profound shifts in the way an individual then engages with their activism, perhaps leading to a more sustainable relationship.

Clients may find it helpful if their therapist was more proactive and willing to introduce the topic of the CEE, for instance at intake assessment stage or when a side-mention is made. This would be a kind of permission giving, signalling to the client that there is space to consider such material in therapy. However, in order to take such a proactive approach in this regard, therapists need to have become climate aware by doing the personal work suggested above. Without this, it will feel too risky to open up an area that is likely to cause anxiety or distress for the therapist.

Developing a broader eco-psychosocial practice would enable clients and therapists to explore emotional and psychological material regarding the CEE more comfortably. My findings suggest this is not the norm for most therapists, and clients similarly do not see therapy as a place to take these concerns. Perhaps therapeutic spaces other than traditional individual therapy, such as group or community-based work or eco-therapy, may be better suited.

My study supports the views of other authors (Mowat, 2022; Aspey, 2021) that many therapists do not feel equipped to work with eco-distress and more training is needed. I argue for training that encourages deeper experiential work by therapists to address their own feelings about the CEE.

9.2.3 What do we understand about the task of therapy and activism in these times?

I believe therapy has a role to play in these times although this is at an early stage of evolution and is still unclear. Therapy could support people when they experience eco-distress, support people to engage with the problem of the CEE and help them find a way to live with the reality. It could support activists to understand their motivations for acting and spot when they may be engaging unconsciously in

abusive or destructive behaviours against themselves or others. However, this requires a revisioning and recrafting of what therapy is for as currently it appears that ecological and sociopolitical concerns do not often enter therapy directly. Neither are a client's vulnerabilities and past traumas routinely linked to their thoughts, feelings and defences about the CEE. A revisioning of how therapy can be done would also be needed.

I have suggested, after Totton (2012), that when therapist and client meet, they each bring their own personal ecologies. Holding a broader frame allows the therapist to consider the possible impact of this and I have argued that therapists need to take a more systemic eco-psychosocial approach moving back and forth between the different registers of the individual, the community, the social, the political and the global.

As well as the potential for activism to bring about societal and political change, the evidence I have presented supports the emotional benefits of engaging in activism and I have theorised the way in which a transitional space is created allowing the containment and working through of difficult feelings. I have, therefore, suggested that group and community-based approaches may be a useful alternative and/or adjunct to individual therapy and therapists should be aware of these and what is available locally for their clients.

9.3 Contributions to the field

This section summarises how my research has contributed to the field of climate psychology. My research was in response to gaps in the literature identified in Chapter 3 and the calls for further research made by organisations such as the International Psychoanalytical Association (Kress et al., 2015), the Royal College of Psychiatrists (2021) and the American Psychological Association (2022), as well as many other researchers working in this field. The gaps identified were a lack of literature taking a dual perspective on therapy and activism, the need for a deeper understanding of how personal biography relates to eco-distress and agency, an exploration of the role of cultural practices in the therapy profession in constructing social defences against eco-distress, the role of social rules in eco-activism for managing eco-distress and the lack of clear guidelines on how therapists can work with eco-distress.

Firstly, let us return to where I began this study, to the three interconnected lenses of the personal, clinical and political:

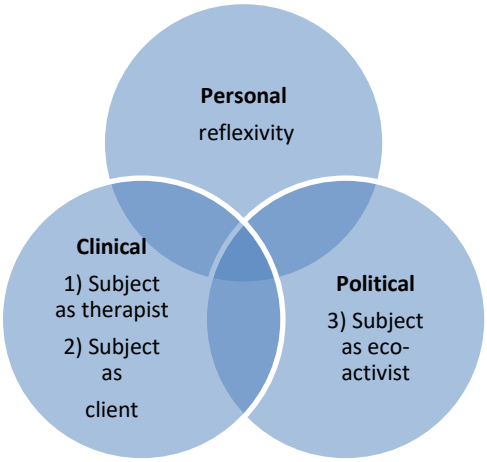


Figure 3 – Three overlapping registers of enquiry

Although both therapy and activism have been suggested as ways of managing eco-distress, research has tended to treat them as separate pathways. By taking a dual perspective and incorporating an additional third lens of personal reflexivity, my research has contributed further insights and understanding to the play of feelings and defences, the separation of inner and outer worlds and the role of transitional space, play and the third. My findings have led me to propose implications for the practice of therapy. Finally, my study has contributed to psycho-social methodology by demonstrating how FANI and BNIM can be adapted for online usage.

Following the discussion of these contributions, I will consider alternative viewpoints to those I propose. I discuss the limitations of my study and make suggestions for future study. I end the chapter with some final thoughts.

9.3.1 Taking a dual perspective

Inner and outer

When the two contexts of therapy and activism are considered together as I have done in this study, a clear inverse pattern in the separation of inner and outer worlds is apparent. In therapy the outer sociopolitical world is often kept out of the work and, conversely, in activism the inner world of feelings is kept out. This has been pointed out by other authors (Lawson, 2021; Hoggett, 1992) and I have discussed my own findings of the separation at length in Chapter 7. My research has added further

understanding of how this separation occurs. The tendency to focus attention on one path or the other is driven by an assemblage of individual and social defences which keeps people habitually in one part of the binary, either immersed in the personal inner world or busy taking action of some kind.

I have shone a light on what can happen in the therapy room between client and therapist in relation to the CEE. Disavowal can lead the therapeutic dyad to turn a blind eye to the CEE even when the more-than-human world is being talked about. Professional guidelines and the social construction of what therapy is for further cements the collusion and defence – a double wall of silence is maintained (Zerubavel, 2006). This means that in the context of the CEE clients and therapists do not routinely engage with their feelings about it and ultimately, therefore, do not connect with their agency to act for change.

In the world of activism, the cultural norms of the particular group can keep the inner world of feelings out of awareness. Activists can be unaware of how their own personal biography is shaping their activism. They fail to connect with their own potential for self-serving behaviours, abusive and destructive behaviours towards self and others, and they risk burnout.

I have provided an argument for an eco-psychosocial space that allows both inner and outer worlds to meet and inform one another. This space could equally be created within a therapeutic or activist context. In therapy, a client's personal history can inform how they respond to the CEE and their feelings about the CEE may be relevant to what is happening in their personal world. For activists, the type of activism they get involved in may be influenced by their personal histories.

Feelings and defences

My study offers a rich picture that supports theoretical literature on psychological defences associated with the CEE through empirical research. It demonstrates the way in which feelings and defences oscillate within the contexts of therapy and activism thus supporting Pihkala's conceptualisation (Pihkala, 2022). In particular, my research has demonstrated the way in which clients tentatively or even unconsciously bring their concerns to therapy by means of side-mentions and the way in which these side-mentions are side-stepped as small talk by therapists. I have argued that such side-mentions should be explored.

For eco-activists my research supports previous literature that shows emotions such as grief and outrage can be a motivation for action (Jasper, 1998) and the emotional benefit of developing close bonds with fellow activists. My research adds to this understanding by demonstrating the complexity of motivating factors, the relevance of unconscious processes and the role that personal biography plays. Previous traumas and emotional needs can also be a powerful motivation to engage in eco-activism as individuals seek belonging, identity and approval.

Transitional space, play and the third

By taking a dual perspective, I have used the therapeutic concepts of transitional space, play (Winnicott, 1971) and the therapeutic third (Benjamin, 2009, 2004) in an original way to theorise that within activism the use of ritual, creative expression and play allows a transitional space where activists come together to process and understand their feelings, and achieve therapeutic benefit. I have contrasted this with what can happen in therapy when the therapist narrows down the transitional space by failing to acknowledge a client's eco-political part self. I have argued that this results in a lost opportunity for therapist and client to engage in thirdness relating, to view the client's feelings about the CEE from a shared vantage point and for the creative exploration of possible action or change.

9.3.2 Implications for practice

Based on my findings, I have offered practical suggestions for how therapy practice can be adapted to work more effectively with eco-distress. Three key areas were identified – therapist adaptation, revisioning therapy as an eco-psychosocial practice, and support from professional bodies and training organisations.

Therapist adaptation

I have argued, along with other authors (Allured, 2022; Kassouf, 2022; Weintrobe, 2021) that therapists who wish to work with eco-distress need to deeply engage with their own feelings and defences around the CEE. Without personal work to become climate aware therapists are more likely to be defended – consciously and unconsciously – and may not notice when a client is bringing eco-distress into the room as side-mentions. They will be more likely to treat side-mentions as small talk rather than opening them up for further exploration, sticking more rigidly to therapeutic contracts and organisational goals. They are more likely to narrow down

the transitional space available for a creative and shared exploration and are unlikely to proactively introduce the topic of the CEE.

These adaptations are not easy and my findings and reflections show how difficult working with this material is, even when there is a willingness to do so. Individual and social defences act as strong and sometimes necessary barriers to engaging deeply with this work. For therapists who choose to work with eco-distress, however, I have provided a strong argument that these adaptations are necessary and training that is experiential as well as theoretical is needed to prepare them.

An eco-psychosocial practice

I am not alone in arguing that therapy should be broadened out to create a space for the critical social issues of our time (Hollway et al., 2022). My study has indicated that although many therapists and clients may have difficulty in doing this and/or may not see this as the role of therapy, some therapists and clients are beginning to question whether therapy could in fact be a safe space to explore concerns about the CEE.

For therapists wishing to work with this material I have illustrated a particular blueprint for revisioning and recrafting seen in eco-therapy. My interviews with two eco-therapists, Amanda and Rob, have shown how taking therapy outdoors for instance, can support clients to recognise their relationship with the more-than-human world and their connection with a broader '*vaster body'* (Amanda) and how this can support inner work as well as outer action. Both Amanda and Rob in different ways found ways to integrate their activist identity into their role as therapists - Amanda by being 'in service to the earth' and Rob by taking NHS patients outside in the hope they would develop a healthier relationship with nature. As Randall says, therapy is 'a cultural practice as well as a personal one' (Randall, 2005, p.177).

My interviews have also shown that as participants linked their personal biographies with their relationship to the more-than-human world their concern regarding the CEE became more prominent. For some, there was a subsequent engagement with their agency. This demonstrates how working eco-psychosocially can bring inner and outer together in an integrated way.

Support from professional bodies and training organisations

My research has provided further evidence that many therapists feel ill equipped to work with eco-distress. The impact of a professional culture of regulation and surveillance compounds the individual and social defences against anxiety that the CEE evokes. My research has shown how performance pressure, fear of professional audits and fear of the loss of status and income serves to narrow the therapeutic frame.

My study, therefore, lends further support for practitioners who are lobbying professional bodies to adapt ethical guidelines to recognise the importance of creating a space for sociocultural issues such as the CEE in therapeutic work. It also supports those who are pressing training organisations to provide more in-depth training on working with eco-distress that supports therapists to work deeply and experientially with their own feelings and defences.

9.3.3 Methodological

Online interviewing

As a result of having to adapt FANI and BNIM for online use, I have evolved the methods in useful ways and provided guidance for other researchers. In particular, I have shown the importance of developing and maintaining intimacy online which I have argued is an important component of these methods. I have discussed this at length in Chapter 4, section 4.7.1 so here I will merely provide a summary.

I have emphasised the importance of care-taking the participant even when not in the same physical space. For instance ensuring their physical comfort throughout the interview. I have suggested that 'arriving' for the interview needs to be considered. As there is no physical journey, virtual journeying can be created through pre-interview correspondence to reduce the 'shock' of seeing each other on screen for the first time. Similarly, ending the interview and allowing for post-interview reflection needs to be done sensitively and with an acknowledgment of an experience shared.

I have shown how technology can both increase and lessen the intimacy between participant and interviewer. Technological failures can interrupt the flow but the experience of a shared intimate entanglement with technology can create moments of human connection even when our technical connection fails.

I have acknowledged the limitations posed by the lack of embodied presence but have also shown it can be helpful when dealing with sensitive topics such as the CEE. It affords an emotional distance that allows participant and interviewer the space to approach potentially distressing material more safely.

Finally, I have shown that a more dialogic style of interviewing than originally advocated by the designers of FANI (Hollway and Jefferson, 2013, 2000) and BNIM (Wengraf, 2018, 2001) can both enhance intimacy in the online environment and lead to deeper insights. This supports Hoggett et al.'s (2010) suggestion that it is a way of assessing the value of an interpretation.

9.4 Alternative viewpoints

In this section I wish to acknowledge and provide a summary of alternative viewpoints to the ones I have proposed as well as other important considerations.

9.4.1 No time to consider the CEE in sessions

Time is limited in therapy sessions, typically fifty to sixty minutes, or even shorter in some IAPT services. In addition, the number of sessions may be limited to as little as four to six. The clients have come to therapy for a specific reason and usually this is not to do with the CEE, even if this may be a relevant, related or background concern. There is, therefore, a pragmatic reason that therapists do not address broader global issues and instead focus on the client's presenting concern. The CEE is just one of many sociopolitical issues that there is not enough time for, so why should we expect therapists to pick up on this one in particular?

My response is that the scale and scope of the CEE is so far reaching. We are potentially facing the end of our civilisation as we have come to know it, based as it is on capitalism and modernity. We are at a cultural tipping point (Hoggett, 2022) and hence the uncertainty of what will come creates existential anxiety. Therapists who are climate-aware will need to exercise judgement in deciding when and for whom it would be appropriate to broaden the frame to include an exploration of the CEE. It is unlikely that all therapists will be willing or able to work in such an eco-psychosocial way. Increasingly, therapists who do wish to work with these issues are making this known on their profiles by calling themselves climate aware or eco-therapists or listing eco-anxiety as something they work with.

9.4.2 Sticking to the therapeutic contract is ethical

It is essential that ethical guidelines are in place to support practitioners and protect clients. However, as examples, neither BACP (2023) or UKCP (2019) ethical guidelines specify that a therapist should not explore beyond a client's presenting issue. Providing the client's best interests are the primary concern, the client's autonomy is respected, and the therapist is working within their range of competence, there is no ethical reason that a therapist should not explore the client's feelings regarding the CEE.

9.4.3 Discussing the CEE would burden clients even more

As has already been discussed, it is important for therapists to exercise judgement regarding which clients and when it would be beneficial to the client to explore their feelings about the CEE. It may be necessary to allow time to work though the client's most pressing concern first before they are in a position to consider the CEE. My interviews with client participants showed that they were all relieved and grateful for the space to discuss the topic even though none of them had gone to therapy for eco-distress.

9.4.4 Getting bogged down in emotions will impede activists

There is a potential tension between therapy's agenda to support people to cope with the reality of the CEE, arguably a kind of survivalism, and activism's agenda of working for political change. This tension was apparent in my research in the difference between the two hunt saboteurs, Luke and Natalie, and the XR activists who were more reflective. There is a danger that therapy leads to an acceptance of the status quo. During intense periods of activism, it could be unhelpful for activists to stop to reflect on how they are feeling. It could result in them feeling overwhelmed and immobilised and could jeopardise the success of the action.

However, my research has shown how reflection *at the right time* can help activists understand their motivations and how their personal biographies inform their actions. This awareness can then protect activists from the risk of burnout and/or acting out in ways that could be harmful to themselves and the desired outcomes of action.

9.4.5 Defences are useful

It has already been acknowledged that defences can be useful at times to prevent overwhelm until such time reality can be faced, and perhaps some things are truly

unbearable for the human mind. However, unconscious defences can render us disconnected from feelings and our subsequent agency. It can lead to disavowal and the perpetuation of business as usual. Pihkala's (2022) model incorporates self-care as a conscious use of distancing to titrate the level of distress to within manageable levels. Sometimes we need respite from our feelings.

9.5 Limitations of the study and further research

As with all qualitative research, the findings of my study are not generalisable. A detailed methodological critique of FANI and BNIM specifically was given in Chapter 4, section 4.7 and discussion regarding the limitation of the participant sample was given in Chapter 4, section 4.3.5. I wish to emphasise this limitation a little more.

In particular, the lack of people of colour in the sample is a significant limitation. The link between social injustice and the CEE was made in Chapter 2, section 2.4, and a racial critique of eco-anxiety was given in Chapter 3, section 3.1.5. Griffin (2022) argues that people of colour experience climate anxiety differently to his white patients. Rather than fearing the future, they express a longing for connection with nature as experienced by previous generations. Griffin describes the predominant anxiety as an 'urgency to protect their bodies and minds' and suggests that the 'psychological underpinnings of climate dismissal and denial did not quite fit' (Griffin, 2022, p.341). Further research into eco-distress amongst people of colour is needed.

Another key limitation of the sample is that participants self-selected as people who had an interest in the natural world. They were, therefore, likely to be more open to discussing their relationship with the natural world and their feelings about the CEE. They were all well educated about the problem. It would be worthwhile to conduct further research amongst people who may not be so interested in the natural world and for whom the CEE is not an obvious concern or who have little knowledge about it. What happens when the topic is raised with them? How do their personal biographies intersect with their outer world concerns? As a corollary to this, it would also be useful to do more research amongst people who are experiencing higher levels of eco-distress and have taken this to therapy. What has been their experience with their therapist? It would be enlightening to conduct research with client-

therapist pairs to deeply explore the dynamics between them regarding the territory of the CEE.

I suggested in Chapter 8 that therapists working in some modalities may find it easier or more compatible with their approach than others to work eco-psychosocially. It would, therefore, be interesting to conduct research amongst therapists of differing modalities to further explore differences or commonalities relating to working with material associated with the CEE.

9.6 Final thoughts

'the old is dying and the new cannot yet be born'

Antonio Gramsci, The Prison Notebooks, 1977, p.276

Therapy has an important role to play in these times of the CEE but it needs to work more eco-psychosocially and more deeply. My research has supported those who are advocating a radical re-framing of therapeutic practice and an 'ethic of engagement with climate change' (Hollway et al., 2022, p.129). Therapy can support activists by helping them to understand their motives and the relationship between their histories and their activism (inner and outer), leading to activism with awareness and preventing burnout. Therapy can support people to live with the reality of the CEE and the difficult feelings it evokes by providing the containment and safety to process them. It can act as a bridge to support people to connect with their agency and to act for change, thereby countering feelings of powerlessness and hopelessness.

In order to be able to do this however, therapists need to first engage with the CEE on a personal level, to process their own feelings and dismantle the individual and social defences that are a barrier to this. Therapists will need support from professional organisations in terms of training and a move away from the highly controlled regulation. As Bednarek suggests, perhaps we 'need to re-wild some aspects of the support we are able to offer in our profession' (Bednarek, 2019, p.10).

Deconstructing a hundred years of psychotherapeutic thinking is a huge task. It is likely to be messy, complex and infused with ambiguity and uncertainty, much like grappling with the CEE. Perhaps there is a limit to how eco-psychosocial therapy can

be. New forms of healing and transformation may be needed where the inner and outer can come together in a truly psycho-social space, a transcultural and liminal space between the old and new world, where we can be in touch with both inner and outer realities. Therapists could act as death and birth ‘doulas’ (Hoggett, 2022), supporting us all to let go of unhelpful cultural assumptions, mourn what has been and will be lost and helping us to birth a new culture. It is hoped that as the CEE becomes increasingly felt by those of us in the more privileged and insulated Global North and eco-distress increases, this study will offer some insights in how we are to live with this reality.

References

Abram, D. (1997) *The Spell of the Sensuous*. New York: Vintage Books.

Adams, M. (2016) *Ecological Crisis, Sustainability and the Psychosocial Subject: Beyond Behaviour Change*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Albrecht, G., Sartore, G.-M., Connor, L., Higginbotham, N., Freeman, S., Kelly, B., Stain, H., Tonna, A. and Pollard, G. (2007) Solastalgia: The Distress Caused by Environmental Change. *Australas Psychiatry* [online]. 15 (1), pp. S95–S98. [Accessed 20 July 2021].

Alexandrov, H. (2009) Experiencing knowledge: the vicissitudes of a research journey. In: Clarke, S. and Hogget, P., eds. (2009) *Researching Beneath the Surface:Psycho-Social Research Methods in Practice*. London: Karnac, pp. 29–49.

Allured, E. (2022) Dreaming Beyond the Traditional Frame: Climate Psychoanalysis Meets the Press. *Psychoanalytic Dialogues* [online]. 32 (4), pp. 341–343. [Accessed 28 September 2022].

Alvesson, M. and Skoldberg, K. (2018) *Reflexive Methodology: New Vistas for Qualitative Research* 3rd edition. London: Sage.

American Psychological Association (2022) *Addressing the Climate Crisis: An Action Plan for Psychologists, Report of the APA Task Force on Climate Change* [online]. Available from: https://www.apa.org/science/about/publications/climate-crisis-action-plan.pdf [Accessed 21 July 2023].

American Psychological Association (2010) *Psychology and Global Climate Change: Addressing a Multi-faceted Phenomenon and Set of Challenges* [online]. Available from: https://www.apa.org/science/about/publications/climate-change-booklet.pdf [Accessed 20 August 2023].

Andrews, N. and Hoggett, P. (2019) Facing up to ecological crisis: a psychosocial perspective from climate psychology. In: Foster, J., ed. (2019) *Facing up to climate reality: honesty, disaster and hope*. London: Green House, pp. 155–165.

Archard, P.J. (2020) Psychoanalytically informed research interviewing: notes on the free association narrative interview method. *Nurse Researcher* [online]. 28 (2), pp. 42–49. [Accessed 9 June 2021].

Armstrong, N. and Pratt-Boyden, K. (2021) Silver linings: how mental health activists can help us navigate wicked problems. *BJPsych Bulletin* [online]. 45 (4), pp. 227–230. [Accessed 29 July 2021].

Ares, E. and Bolton, P. (2020) The rise of climate change activism? *The House of Commons Library*. 24 June 2020 [online]. Available from:

https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/the-rise-of-climate-change-activism/ [Accessed 14 July 2023].

Aspey, L. (2021) The big issue: Breaking out of the climate bubble. *Therapy Today*. (November 2021), pp. 17–20.

Babić, R. (2018) Addictions without drugs: Contemporary addictions or way of life? *Addictions without drugs: Contemporary addictions or way of life?* 30(6) pp. 371–379.

BACP (2023) *Ethical Framework for the Counselling Professions*. Available from https://www.bacp.co.uk/events-and-resources/ethics-and-standards/ethical-framework-for-the-counselling-professions/ [Accessed 30 November 2023].

BACP (2022) Reactions. *Therapy Today*. (February 2022), p. 12.

BACP (2021) *Therapy Today*. (November 2021).

Barnwell, G., Stroud, L. and Watson, M. (2020) Critical reflections from South Africa: Using the Power Threat Meaning Framework to place climate-related distress in its sociopolitical context. *Clinical Psychology Forum*. 332 (August 2020), pp. 7–15.

Bednarek, S. (2021) A Time of Derangement *Resurgence and Ecologist*. (327), pp. 24–27.

Bednarek, S. (2020) This is an emergency [blog]. Available from: https://www.psychotherapyinbrighton.com/blogpost.php?permalink=this-is-an-emergency [Accessed 24 July 2023].

Bednarek, S. (2019) 'This is an emergency' – proposals for a collective response to the climate crisis. *British Gestalt Journal*. 28 (2), pp. 4–13.

Belkin, G. (2022) ecoAmerica *Community Hubs*. 27 May 2022 [online]. Available from: https://ecoamerica.org/community-hubs/ [Accessed 9 June 2023].

Bendell, J. (2020) *Deep Adaptation: A Map for Navigating Climate Tragedy*, Occasional Paper [online]. Institute for Leadership and Sustainability, Cumbria University. Available from: http://www.lifeworth.com/deepadaptation.pdf [Accessed 20 July 2021].

Benjamin, J. (2012) Facing Reality Together: Discussion of 'The Social Third'. In: Dimen, M. ed. (2012) *With Culture in Mind*. London: Routledge.

Benjamin, J. (2009) A relational psychoanalysis perspective on the necessity of acknowledging failure in order to restore the facilitating and containing features of the intersubjective relationship (the shared third). *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis* [online]. 90 (3), pp. 441–450. [Accessed 27 May 2022].

Benjamin, J. (2004) Beyond Doer and Done To: an Intersubjective View of Thirdness. *The Psychoanalytic quarterly* [online]. 73 (1), pp. 5–46. [Accessed 20 July 2021].

Berger,R. (2006) Beyond words: nature-therapy in action. *Journal of Critical Psychology, Counseling and Psychotherapy*. 6 (4), pp. 195–199.

Bernstein, J. (2015) Transdisciplinarity: A Review of Its Origins, Development, and Current Issues. *Journal of Research Practice*. 11 (1), pp. 1–20.

Bhopal, A. (2023) 'Are you a researcher or an activist?': navigating tensions in climate change and health research. *The Journal of Climate Change and Health* [online]. p. 100267. [Accessed 19 September 2023].

Bion, W. (1965) *Transformations: Change from leaming to growth*. London: Tavistock.

Bion, W. (1962) *Learning from experience*. London: Karnac Books.

Bion, W. (1961) *Experiences in groups and other papers*. London and New York: Routledge.

Blackman, J. (2004) *101 Defences: How the mind shields itself*. Hove: Psychology Press.

Bodnar, S. et al. (2023) The Environment as an Object Relationship: A Two-Part Study. *Ecopsychology* [online]. 15 (2), pp. 110–118. [Accessed 23 June 2023].

Bodnar, S. (2008) Wasted and Bombed: Clinical Enactments of a Changing Relationship to the Earth. *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*. 18 (4), pp. 484–512.

Bond, T. (2015) Ethical Considerations. In: Vossler, A. and Moller, N., eds. (2015) *The Counselling and Psychotherapy Research Handbook*. London: Sage, pp. 101–115.

Bondi, L. (2013) Research and Therapy: Generating Meaning and Feeling Gaps. *Qualitative Inquiry* [online]. 19 (1), pp. 9–19. [Accessed 27 July 2021].

Bordieu, P. (1985) The forms of capital. In: Biggart, N. ed. (2002) *Readings in economic sociology*. Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 280–291.

Bragg, E.A. (1996) Towards Ecological Self: Deep Ecology Meets Constructionist Self-theory. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 16 , pp. 93–108.

Bragg, R. and Atkins, G. (2016) *A review of nature-based interventions for mental health care (NECR204)* [online]. York, Natural England. Available from: https://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/4513819616346112 [Accessed 20 July 2021].

Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2021) Can I use TA? Should I use TA? Should I not use TA? Comparing reflexive thematic analysis and other pattern-based qualitative analytic approaches. *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research* [online]. 21 (1), pp. 37–47. [Accessed 20 July 2021].

Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2019) Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*. 11 (4), pp. 589–597.

Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2013) *Successful Qualitative Research: a practical guide for beginners*. London: Sage.

Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*. 3, pp. 77–101.

British Medical Association (2020) *The climate emergency is a health emergency, says BMA*. Available from: https://www.bma.org.uk/bma-media-centre/the-climate-emergency-is-a-health-emergency-says-bma [Accessed 16 February 2023].

British Psychological Society (2020) Psychology and the climate and environmental crisis. *Clinical Psychology Forum*. (332).

Brown, G. and Pickerill, J. (2009) Editorial: Activism and emotional sustainability. *Activism and Emotional Sustainability* [online]. 2 (1), pp. 1–3. [Accessed 24 May 2023].

Buchs, M., Hinton, E. and Smith, G. (2015) 'It helped me sort of face the end of the world': The role of emotions for third sector climate change engagement initiatives. *Environmental Values*. 24 (5), pp. 621–640.

Budziszewska, M. and Jonsson, S.E. (2021) From Climate Anxiety to Climate Action: An Existential Perspective on Climate Change Concerns Within Psychotherapy. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* [online] 0 (0). [Accessed 23 September 2022].

Capaldi, C.A., Dopko, R.L. and Zelenski, J.M. (2014) The relationship between nature connectedness and happiness: a meta-analysis. *Frontiers in psychology*, 5, pp. 1–15.

Carbon Conversations (no date) *Carbon Conversations*. Available from: https://www.carbonconversations.co.uk/p/about.html [Accessed 30 June 2022].

Cartwright, D. (2004) The psychoanalytic research interview: Preliminary suggestions. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*. 52 (1), pp. 209–242.

Clarke, S. and Hogget, P. (2009) Researching beneath the surface: a psycho-social approach to research, practice and method. In: Clarke, S. and Hogget, P., eds. (2009) *Researching Beneath the Surface: Psycho-Social Research Methods in Practice.* London: Karnac, pp. 17–49.

Clayton, S. (2020) Climate anxiety: Psychological responses to climate change. *Journal of Anxiety Disorders* [online]. 74, p. 102263. [Accessed 12 October 2022].

Clayton, S. and Karazsia, B.T. (2020) Development and validation of a measure of climate change anxiety. *Journal of Environmental Psychology* [online]. 69, p. 101434. [Accessed 7 October 2021].

Clayton, S., Manning, C.M., Krygsman, K. and Speiser, M. (2017) *Mental Health and Our Changing Climate: Impacts, Implications, and Guidance.* Washington D.C.: American Psychological Association and ecoAmerica.

Climate Psychology Alliance (2023) What is climate psychology. [online]. Available from: https://www.climatepsychologyalliance.org/index.php/component/content/article/what-is-climate-psychology?catid=12&Itemid=101 [Accessed 1 September 2023].

Climate Psychology Alliance (2022) *Climate Psychology Handbook* [online]. Available from: https://www.climatepsychologyalliance.org/index.php/component/content/article/climate-psychology-handbook?catid=15&Itemid=101 [Accessed 21 May 2023].

Coates, K. (2020) Connecting to the ecological and climate crisis. *Clinical Psychology Forum*. 332, pp. 45–50.

Coffey, Y., Bhullar, N., Durkin, J., Islam, M.S. and Usher, K. (2021) Understanding Eco-anxiety: A Systematic Scoping Review of Current Literature and Identified Knowledge Gaps. *The Journal of Climate Change and Health* [online]. p. 100047. [Accessed 6 October 2021].

Cohen, S. (2013) Discussion: Climate change in a perverse culture. In: Weintrobe, S., ed. (2013) *Engaging with Climate Change: Psychoanalytic and Interdisciplinary perspectives*. Hove: Routledge, pp. 72–79.

Cooper, M. (2020) Non-Directivity: Some Critical Reflections, *Research Findings* [blog]. 01 July. Available from: https://mick-cooper.squarespace.com/new-blog/category/Research+Findings [Accessed 15 August 2022].

Cooper, M., Norcross, J.C., Raymond-Barker, B., and Hogan, T.P. (2019) Psychotherapy preferences of laypersons and mental health professionals: Whose therapy is it? *Psychotherapy*. 56 (2), pp. 205–216.

Coppola, I. (2021) *Eco-Anxiety in "the Climate Generation": Is Action an Antidote?*. Undergraduate thesis, University of Vermont. Available from: https://scholarworks.uvm.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1078&context=envstheses [Accessed 2 June 2023].

Coppola, I. and Pihkala, P. (2023) Complex dynamics of climate emotions among environmentally active Finnish and American young people. *Frontiers in Political Science* [online]. 4. [Accessed 23 September 2023].

Croasdale, K., Grailey, K., Jennings, N., Mole, J. and Lawrance, E.L. (2023) Planning for the perfect storm: perceptions of UK mental health professionals on the increasing impacts of climate change on their service users. *The Journal of Climate Change and Health* [online]. 13, p. 100253. [Accessed 16 June 2023].

Crociani-Windland, L. (2018) The researcher's subjectivity as a research instrument: from intuition to surrender. In: Cummins, A-M. and Williams, N., eds. (2018) *Further Researching Beneath the Surface (Volume 2): Psycho-social research methods in practice.* Abingdon, Routledge.

Crociani-Windland, L. (2011) Conclusion. In: *Festivals, Affect and Identity: A Deleuzian Apprenticeship in Central Italian Communities*. London: Anthem Press, pp. 179–186. Available from: https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/festivals-affect-and-identity/conclusion/1A7DB5DE7AA28824986B06913872FC37. [Accessed 14 July 2023].

Crociani-Windland, L. (2009) How to live and learn: learning, duration and, the virtual. In: Clarke, S. and Hoggett, P., eds. (2009) *Researching Beneath the surface: Psycho-social research methods in practice.* London: Karnac, pp. 51–78.

Crociani-Windland, L. and Hoggett, P. (2012) Politics and affect. *Subjectivity* [online]. 5 (2), pp. 161–179. [Accessed 24 May 2022].

Cunsolo, A. and Ellis, N.R. (2018) Ecological grief as a mental health response to climate change-related loss. *Nature Climate Change*. 8, pp. 275–281.

Dalal, F. (2018) *CBT: The Cognitive Behavioural Tsunami: Managerialism, Politics and the Corruption of Science*. London: Routledge.

Damasio, A. (2000) *The Feeling of What Happens: body, emotion and the making of consciousness*. London: Vintage.

Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F. (1988) *A Thousand Plateaus: capitalism and schizophrenia*. London: Athalone Press.

Devall, B. (1995) The Ecological Self. In: Drengson, A. and Inoue, Y., eds. (1995) *The Deep Ecology Movement: An Introductory Anthology*. Berkley, California: North Atlantic Books, pp. 101–123.

Dickinson, J. (2009) The People Paradox: Self-Esteem Striving, Immortality Ideologies, and Human Response to Climate Change. *Ecology and Society* [online]. 14 (1). [Accessed 7 July 2023].

Dickson-Swift, V., James, E., L., Kippen, S. and Liamputtong, P. (2008) Risk to Researchers in Qualitative Research on Sensitive Topics: Issues and Strategies. *Qualitative Health Research*. 18 (1), pp. 133–144.

Dodds, J. (2021) The psychology of climate anxiety. *BJPsych Bulletin* [online]. 45 (4), pp. 222–226. [Accessed 29 July 2021].

Dodds, J. (2020) *ELEMENTAL CATASTROPHE: ECOPSYCHOANALYSIS AND THE VIRAL UNCANNY OF COVID-19*. [online]. Available from: https://stillpointmag.org/articles/elemental-catastrophe-ecopsychoanalysis-and-the-viral-uncanny-of-covid-19/. [Accessed 20 July 2021].

Dodds, J. (2011) *Psychoanalysis and Ecology at the Edge of Chaos*. E. Sussex: Routledge.

Duncan, R. (2018) *Nature in Mind: Systemic thinking and imagination in ecopsychology and mental health*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Dunlap, R.E. and McCright, A. M. (2011) Organized climate change denial. In: J.S. Dryzek, R.B. Norgaard, and D. Schlosberg, eds. (2011) *The Oxford Handbook of Climate Change and Society*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 144–160.

Dyregrov A 1989 Caring for helpers in disaster situations: psychological debriefing. *Disaster Management* 2 (1), pp. 25-30

Farrar, N. and Hanley, T. (2023) Where "culture wars" and therapy meet: Exploring the intersection between political issues and therapeutic practice. *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research* [online]. 23 (3), pp. 593–597. [Accessed 18 July 2023].

Fiennes, N. (2019) Extinction Rebellion isn't 'beyond politics' – and its members are waking up to their white privilege problem *Independent* [online]. October. Available from: https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/extinction-rebellion-climate-crisis-justice-diversity-white-privilege-police-a9145776.html [Accessed 10 August 2021].

Finlay, L. (2011) *Phenomenology for Therapists: Researching the Lived World*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.

Finlay, L. (2003) The reflexive journey: mapping multiple routes. In: Finlay, L. and Gough, B., eds. (2003) *Reflexivity: a practical guide for researchers in health and social sciences*. Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 3–20.

Flanagan, P. (2014) Ethical beginnings: Reflexive questioning in designing child sexuality research. *Counselling and psychotherapy Research*. 14 (2), pp. 139–146.

French, R.B. and Simpson, P. (2010) The 'work group': Redressing the balance in Bion's Experiences in Groups. *Human Relations*. 63 (12), pp. 1859–1878.

Freud, A. (1936) *The ego and the mechanisms of defence (trans: Baines, C.)*, London: Hogarth Press.

Freud, S. (1930) Civilization and Its Discontents. In: Gay, P., ed. (1995) *The Freud Reader*. London: Vintage Books, pp. 722–772.

Freud, S. (1927) The Future of an Illusion. In: Gay, P., ed. (1995) *The Freud Reader*. London: Vintage Books, pp. 686–722.

Freud, S. (1920) Beyond the Pleasure Principle. In: Gay, P., ed. (1995) *The Freud Reader*. London: Vintage Books, pp. 594–626.

Freud, S. (1919) The `Uncanny'. In: James Strachey, ed. (2001) *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud.* The Standard Edition. XVII, London: Vintage Books, pp. 217–256.

Freud, S. (1918) The Taboo of Virginity In: James Strachey, ed. (2001) *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud.* XI, London: Vintage Books, pp. 191–208.

Freud, S. (1896) The Neuroses of Defence. In: Gay, P., ed. (1995) *The Freud Reader,* London: Vintage Books, pp. 90–96.

Freud, S. and Breuer, J. (1856) *Studies in Hysteria*. London: Penguin.

Fridays For Future (2023) Strike Statistics *Fridays for Future*. 14 July 2023 [online]. Available from: https://fridaysforfuture.org/what-we-do/strike-statistics/list-of-countries/ [Accessed 14 July 2023].

Frosh, S. (2003) Psychosocial studies and psychology: Is a critical approach emerging? *Human Relations*. 56 (12), pp. 1545–1567.

Frosh, S. and Emerson, P.D. (2005) Interpretation and over-interpretation: disputing the meaning of texts. *Qualitative Research* [online]. 5 (3), pp. 307–324. [Accessed 8 January 2020].

Frosh, S., Phoenix, A. and Pattman, R. (2003) Taking a stand: Using psychoanalysis to explore the positioning of subjects in discourse. *British Journal of Social Psychology* [online]. 42 (1), pp. 39–53. [Accessed 3 January 2020].

Gayle, D. (2019) Does Extinction Rebellion have a race problem? *The Guardian* [online]. October. Available from: https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/oct/04/extinction-rebellion-race-climate-crisis-inequality [Accessed 10 August 2021].

Giddens, A. (1991) *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Gillespie, S. (2019) Researching Climate Engagement: Collaborative Conversations and Consciousness Change. In: Hoggett, P., ed. (2019) *Climate Psychology: On Indifference to Disaster*. Switzerland: Springer Nature, pp. 107–127.

Glover, J. (2021) *Landscapes Review* [online]. Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Available from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/833726/landscapes-review-final-report.pdf [Accessed 3 August 2023].

Gold, S.N. and Cherry, E.F. (1997) The Therapeutic Frame: On the Need for Flexibility. *Journal of Contemporary Psychotherapy* [online]. 27 (2), pp. 147–155.

Graham, K. (2020) 8 Ways to Cope with Eco-Anxiety *Welldoing.org*. 21 January 2020 [online]. Available from: https://welldoing.org/article/8-ways-cope-eco-anxiety?utm_source=Welldoing.org+weekly+newsletter+recipients&utm_campaign=816485d5db-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2022_04_13_01_14&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_2af528cb38-816485d5db-298977085 [Accessed 21 July 2022].

Gramsci, A. (1977) *The Prison Notebooks*. London: Lawrence and Wishart.

Greenfield, P. (2022) More than 1,700 environmental activists murdered in the past decade – report. *The Guardian* [online]. September. Available from: https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/sep/29/global-witness-report-1700-activists-murdered-past-decade-aoe [Accessed 10 July 2023].

Griffin, C.D. (2022) Who's on My Couch? Considering BIPOC Subjectivity and the Climate Crisis. *Psychoanalytic Dialogues* [online]. 32 (4), pp. 340–341. [Accessed 25 August 2023].

Groves, C., Henwood, K., Shirani, F., Butler, C., Parkhill, K. and Pidgeon, N. (2016) Invested in unsustainability? On the psychosocial patterning of engagement in practices. *Environmental Values*. 25 (3), pp. 309–328.

Gould, D. (2002) Life During Wartime: Emotions and The Development of Act Up. *Mobilization*. 7 (2), pp. 177–200.

Guattari, F. (2000) *The Three Ecologies*. New Brunswick: The Athlone Press.

Hamilton, J. (2019) Emotions, Reflexivity and the Long Haul: What We Do About How We Feel About Climate Change. In: Hoggett, P., ed. (2019) *Climate Psychology: On Indifference to Disaster*. Switzerland: Springer Nature, pp. 153–175.

Hanley, T., Jordan, C. and Wilk, K. (2015) Planning your Research: Design, method and sample. In: Vossler, A. and Moller, N., eds. (2015) *The Counselling and Psychotherapy Research Handbook*. London: Sage, pp. 88–100.

Haraway, D.J. (2016) *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Heglar, M. (2019) *Climate Change Isn't the First Existential Threat*. Zora. 18 February 2019 [online]. Available from: https://zora.medium.com/sorry-yall-but-climate-change-ain-t-the-first-existential-threat-b3c999267aa0 [Accessed 2 June 2023].

Heimann, P. (1950) On Counter-transference. *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis*. 31, pp. 81–84.

Hickman, C. (2020) We need to (find a way to) talk about … Eco-anxiety. [online]. 34 (4), pp. 411–424. [Accessed 20 July 2021].

Hickman, C., Marks, E., Pihkala, P., Clayton, S., Lewandowski, R.E., Mayall, E.E., Wray, B., Mellor, C. and van Susteren, L. (2021) Climate anxiety in children and young people and their beliefs about government responses to climate change: a global survey. *The Lancet Planetary Health* [online]. 5 (12), pp. e863–e873. [Accessed 17 January 2023].

Hinshelwood, B. (2013) Discussion. Unconscious obstacles to caring for the planet: Facing up to human nature. In: Weintrobe, S., ed. (2013) *Engaging with Climate Change: Psychoanalytic and Interdisciplinary perspectives*. Hove: Routledge, pp. 165–169.

Hinshelwood, R.D. (1993) The Countryside. *British Journal of Psychotherapy*. 10 (2), pp. 202–210.

Hirsch, I. (2008) *Coasting in the countertransference: conflicts of self interest between analyst and patient.* Abingdon: Routledge.

Hoexter, M. (2016) A Pocket Handbook of Soft Climate Denial *New Economic Persepectives*. 6 October 2016 [online]. Available from: https://neweconomicperspectives.org/2016/10/pocket-handbook-soft-climate-denial.html [Accessed 15 July 2022].

Hogg, T.L., Stanley, S.K. and O'Brien, L.V. (2023) Synthesising psychometric evidence for the Climate Anxiety Scale and Hogg Eco-Anxiety Scale. *Journal of Environmental Psychology* [online]. 88, p. 102003. [Accessed 16 June 2023].

Hoggett, P. (2022) Climate change: From denialism to nihilism. In: Hollway, W., Hoggett, P., Robertson, C., and Weintrobe, S., eds. (2022) *Climate Psychology: A matter of life and death*. Bicester: Phoenix Publishing House, pp. 15–41.

Hoggett, P. (2020) The nature within. *Journal of Social Work Practice* [online]. 34 (4), pp. 367–376. [Accessed 20 July 2021].

Hoggett, P. (2019) Introduction. In: Hoggett, P., ed. (2019) *Climate Psychology: On Indifference to Disaster*. Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 1–19.

Hoggett, P. (2013) Climate change in a perverse culture. In: Weintrobe, S., ed. (2013) *Engaging with Climate Change: Psychoanalystic and Interdisciplinary Perspectives*. Hove: Routledge, pp. 56–83.

Hoggett, P. (2009) *Politics, Identity and Emotion*. Boulder, CO.: Paradigm Publishers.

Hoggett, P. (2008) What's in a Hyphen? Reconstructing Psychosocial Studies. *Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society* [online]. 13 (4), pp. 379–384. [Accessed 27 January 2022].

Hoggett, P. (1992) *Partisans in an Uncertain World: The Psychoanalysis of Engagement*. London: Free Association Books.

Hoggett, P. and Randall, R. (2018) Engaging with Climate Change: Comparing the Cultures of Science and Activism. *Environmental Values*. 27 (3), pp. 223–243.

Hoggett, P. and Randall, R. (2016) *Sustainable activism: managing hope and despair in social movements*. 2016 [online]. Available from: https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/transformation/sustainable-activism-managing-hope-and-despair-in-socia/ [Accessed 20 July 2021].

Hoggett, P., Beedell, P., Jimenez, L., Mayo, M. and Miller, C. (2010) Working psycho-socially and dialogically in research. *Psychoanalysis, Culture & society*. 15 (2), pp. 173–188.

Hollander, N.C. (2009) When not knowing allies with destructiveness: global warning and psychoanalytic ethical non-neutrality. *International Journal of Applied Psychoanalytic Studies* [online]. 6 (1), pp. 1–11. [Accessed 5 July 2023].

Hollway, W. (2006) Paradox in the Pursuit of a Critical Theorization of the Development of Self in Family Relationships. *Theory & Psychology* [online]. 16 (4), pp. 465–482. [Accessed 8 January 2020].

Hollway, W. and Jefferson, T. (2013) *Doing Qualitative Research Differently* 2nd edition. London: Sage.

Hollway, W. and Jefferson, T. (2005) Panic and perjury: A psychosocial exploration of agency. *British Journal of Social Psychology* [online]. 44 (2), pp. 147–163. [Accessed 6 August 2021].

Hollway, W. and Jefferson, T. (2000) *Doing Qualitative Research Differently: free association, narrative and the interview method.* London: Sage.

Hollway, W., Hoggett, P., Robertson, C., and Weintrobe, S. (2022) Introduction: A matter of life and death. In: *Climate Psychology: A Matter of Life and Death*. Bicester: Phoenix Publishing House, pp. 1–13.

Hollway, W., Kofoed, J., Ruch, G., Sims, L., Thomson, R. and Tonkin, L. (2020) Carbon-lite collaboration: a virtual visual matrix. *Journal of Psychosocial Studies*. 13 (2), pp. 135–149.

Holmes, J. (2019) *A Practical Psychoanalytic Guide to Reflexive Research*. London and New York: Routledge.

Holmes, J. (2013) A comparison of clinical psychoanalysis and research interviews. *Human Relations* [online]. 66 (9), pp. 1183–1199.

Howard, L. (2022) When global problems come home: Engagement with climate change within the intersecting affective spaces of parenting and activism. *Emotion, Space and Society* [online]. 44, p. 100894. [Accessed 24 August 2022].

Hunt, J. (1989) *Psychoanalytic Aspects of Fieldwork*. London: Sage.

IAPT Team, NHS Digitals (2021) *Psychological Therapies, Annual report on the use of IAPT services, 2020-21* [online]. Available from: https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/psychological-therapies-annual-reports-on-the-use-of-iapt-services/annual-report-2020-21 [Accessed 21 July 2023].

Ingle, H. (2021) Perspectives on Climate Justice for Psychology. *Clinical Psychology Forum*. (332), pp. 16–21.

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2022) *Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability. Summary for Policy Makers* [online]. Available from: https://report.ipcc.ch/ar6wg2/pdf/IPCC_AR6_WGII_SummaryForPolicymakers.pdf [Accessed 17 June 2022].

Irizar, P. *et al.* (2023) Pathways to ethnic inequalities in COVID-19 health outcomes in the United Kingdom: A systematic map. *Social Science & Medicine* [online]. 329, p. 116044. [Accessed 21 September 2023].

Jasper, J.M. (1998) The Emotions of Protest: Affective and Reactive Emotions In and Around Social Movements. *Sociological Forum*. 13 (3), pp. 397–424.

Jordan, M. (2015) *Nature and Therapy: Understanding counselling and psychotherapy in outdoor spaces*. East Sussex: Routledge.

Jordan, M. (2009) Nature and Self—An Ambivalent Attachment? *Ecopsychology*. 1 (1), pp. 26–31.

Joye, Y. and van den B., A. (2011) Is love for green in our genes? A critical analysis of evolutionary assumptions in restorative environments research. *Urban Forestry and Urban Greening*. 10 (4), pp. 261–268.

Jung, C.G. (1917) *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology* 2nd edition. Vol. 7, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Kałwak, W. and Weihgold, V. (2022) The Relationality of Ecological Emotions: An Interdisciplinary Critique of Individual Resilience as Psychology's Response to the Climate Crisis. *Frontiers in Psychology* [online]. 13, pp. 1–10. [Accessed 26 August 2022].

Kaplan, R. and Kaplan, S. (1989) *The Experience of Nature: A Psychological Perspective.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kassouf, S. (2023) Human among the more-than-human. Retrofitting Kohut for the Anthropocene. *Psychoanalysis, Self and Context* [online]. pp. 1–21. [Accessed 11 May 2023].

Kassouf, S. (2022) THINKING CATASTROPHIC THOUGHTS: A TRAUMATIZED SENSIBILITY ON A HOTTER PLANET. *The American Journal of Psychoanalysis* [online]. 82, pp. 60–79. [Accessed 7 April 2022].

Kassouf, S. (2017) Psychoanalysis and Climate Change: Revisiting Searles's The Nonhuman Environment, Rediscovering Freud's Phylogenetic Fantasy, and Imagining a Future. *American Imago*. 74 (2), pp. 141–171.

Keene, J. (2013) Unconscious obstacles to caring for the planet: Facing up to human nature. In: Weintrobe, S., ed. (2013) *Engaging with Climate Change: Psychoanalytic and Interdisciplinary perspectives*. Hove: Routledge, pp. 144–159.

Kerecman-Myers, D. (2017) Climate Change and Mental Health: Q&A with Lise Van Susteren, MD. *Global Health Now*. 2017 [online]. Available from: https://www.globalhealthnow.org/2017-03/climate-change-and-mental-health-qa-lise-van-susteren-md [Accessed 20 July 2021].

Kidner, D. (2007) Depression and the natural world: towards a critical ecology of psychological distress. *Critical Psychology*, 19, pp. 123–146.

Klein, M. (1946) Notes on some schizoid mechanisms. In: Mitchell, J., ed. (1991) *The Selected Melanie Klein*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, pp. 176–200.

Knapp, P. (2022) 'Doctors Shauna Golden and Patrick Hart on public health, the climate crisis and activism'. *Tipping Points*, [podcast]. May. Available from: https://granthaminstitute.podbean.com/e/18-doctors-shauna-goldman-and-patrick-heart-on-public-health-the-climate-crisis-and-activism/ [Accessed 2 March 2023].

Knight, K. (2020) Climate activism as a clinical psychologist. *Clinical Psychology Forum*. 332, pp. 40–44.

Koger, S.M. and Du Nann Winter, D. (2011) *The Psychology of Environmental Problems: Psychology for Sustainability*. 3rd ed. Hove, Sussex: Taylor & Francis

Kohut, H. (1971) *The Analysis of the Self: A Systematic Approach to the Psychoanalytic Treatment of Narcissistic Personality Disorders*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Kohut, H. (1984) *How Does Analysis Cure?* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Kress, J., Clarkson, L., Moss, D. and Zeavin, L. (2015) *The Boston Declaration on the Role of the International Psychoanalytical Association in Addressing Global Change*. 2015 [online]. Available from: https://apsa.org/content/news-international-psychoanalytical-associations-declaration-addressing-global-change [Accessed 20 July 2021].

Kvale, S. (2002) The Social Construction of Validity. In: Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S., eds. *The Qualitative Inquiry Reader*. London: Sage, pp. 299–323.

Kvale, S. (1999) The Psychoanalytic Interview as Qualitative Research. *Qualitative Inquiry*. 5 (1), pp. 87–113.

Langs, R.J. (1979) *The Listening Process*. Maryland, United States:Jason Aronson.

Latimer, J. and López Gómez, D. (2019) Intimate Entanglements: Affects, more-than-human intimacies and the politics of relations in science and technology. *The Sociological Review* [online]. 67 (2), pp. 247–263. [Accessed 6 August 2021].

Lawrance, E.L., Thompson, R., Newberry Le Vay, J., Page, L. and Jennings, N. (2022) The Impact of Climate Change on Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing: A Narrative Review of Current Evidence, and its Implications. [online]. 34 (5), pp. 443–498. [Accessed 6 October 2022].

Lawrance, E., Thompson, R., Fontana, G., and Jennings, N. (2021) *The impact of climate change on mental health and emotional wellbeing: current evidence and implications for policy and practice*, Briefing Paper [online]. Imperial College, London, Grantham Institute, pp. 1–36. Available from: https://spiral.imperial.ac.uk/bitstream/10044/1/88568/7/The%20impact%20of%20climate%20change%20on%20mental%20health%20and%20emotional%20wellbeing%20-%20current%20evidence%20and%20implications%20for%20policy%20and%20practice%20%281%29.pdf [Accessed 27 October 2021].

Lawson, A. (2021) *The Entangled Activist*. London: Perspectiva Press.

Lee, R.M. and Renzetti, C.M. (1990) The Problems of Researching Sensitive Topics. *The American behavioral scientist*, 33 (5), pp. 510–528.

Le Grange, L. (2018) WHAT IS (POST)QUALITATIVE RESEARCH? *South African Journal of Higher Education*. 32 (5), pp. 1–14.

Lertzman, R. (2015) *Environmental Melancholia: Psychoanalytic dimensions of engagement*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

Li, C., Lawrance, E.L., Morgan, G., Brown, R., Greaves, N., Krzanowski, J., Samuel, S., Guinto, R.R. and Belkin, G. (2022) The role of mental health professionals in the climate crisis: an urgent call to action. *International Review of Psychiatry* [online]. 34 (5), pp. 563–570. [Accessed 31 October 2022].

Longman, D.J., Braddon, M.M., Verlie, D.B., Schlosberg, P.D., Hampshire, M.L., Hawke, A.C., Noonan, M.A. and Saurman, D.E. (2023) Building resilience to the mental health impacts of climate change in rural Australia. *The Journal of Climate Change and Health* [online]. p. 100240. [Accessed 2 June 2023].

Lovell, R. (2016) *Links between natural environments and mental health: evidence briefing (EIN018)* [online]. York: Natural England. Available from: http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/5748047200387072 [Accessed 20 July 2021].

Lucas, C., Leith, P. and Davison, A. (2015) How climate change research undermines trust in everyday life: a review. *WIREs Climate Change* [online]. 6 (1), pp. 79–91. [Accessed 24 March 2023].

Macagnino, T. (2023) Online Free Association Narrative Interviewing: Intimacy, embodied experience and technological entanglements. *Qualitative Methods in Psychotherapy and Counselling Psychology Research*. (35), pp. 60–66.

Macy, J. and Johnstone, C. (2012) *Active Hope: How to face the mess we're in without going crazy.* Novato, CA.: New World Library.

Macy, J. and Young Brown, M. (1998) *Coming Back to Life: Practices to Reconnect our Lives.* Gabriola Island, BC, Canada: New Society.

Martin, M. and Islar, M. (2021) The 'end of the world' vs. the 'end of the month': understanding social resistance to sustainability transition agendas, a lesson from the Yellow Vests in France. *Sustainability Science* [online]. 16 (2), pp. 601–614. [Accessed 6 October 2021].

Massumi, B. (2021/2002) Parables for the Virtual : Movement, Affect, Sensation [online]. Durham: Duke University Press Books. Available from: https://ezproxy.uwe.ac.uk/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=2988781&site=ehost-live [Accessed 15 December 2022].

McGinn, M. (2019) *2019's biggest pop-culture trend was climate anxiety*. Grist [online]. Available from: https://grist.org/politics/2019s-biggest-pop-culture-trend-was-climate-anxiety/ [Accessed 12 October 2022].

McNeill, B.W. and Worthen, V. (1989) The parallel process in psychotherapy supervision. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*. 20 (5), pp. 329–333.

Mental health UK (no date.) Burnout. Available from: https://mentalhealth-uk.org/burnout/ [Accessed 26 July 2023].

Menzies Lyth, I. (1960) Social Systems as a defence against anxiety. *Human Relations*. 13, pp. 95–121.

Michas, F. (2022) Annual number of therapy professionals in the United Kingdom (UK) from 2010 to 2021 *Statista*. Available from: https://www.statista.com/statistics/318902/numbers-of-therapy-professionals-in-the-uk/ [Accessed 21 July 2023].

Miller, M. (1999) Chaos, complexity, and psychoanalysis. *Psychoanalytic Psychology*. 16 (3), pp. 355–379.

Milligan, C. and Bingley, A. (2007) Restorative places or scary spaces? The impact of woodland on the mental well-being of young adults. *Health & Place* [online]. 13 (4), pp. 799–811. [Accessed 20 July 2021].

Mind (2018) 40 per cent of all GP appointments about mental health *Mind*. 5 June 2018 [online]. Available from: https://www.mind.org.uk/news-campaigns/news/40-per-cent-of-all-gp-appointments-about-mental-health/ [Accessed 21 July 2023].

Mind (2013) *Feel better outside, feel better inside: Ecotherapy for mental wellbeing, resilience and recovery*. Available from: https://www.mind.org.uk/news-campaigns/news/new-research-shows-benefits-of-ecotherapy-for-mental-health-and-wellbeing/ [Accessed 20 July 2021].

Mitchell, J. (1986) *The Selected Melanie Klein*. London: Penguin.

Mitchells, B. (2018) *Ethical guidelines for research in the counselling professions*. Lutterworth: British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy.

Monbiot, G. (2014) *Feral: Rewilding the land, sea and human life.* London: Penguin Books.

Morton, T. (2013) *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Moser, S.C. (2019) Despairing about the Climate Crisis? Read This. *Earth Island Journal* [online]. 22 July. Available from: https://www.earthisland.org/journal/index.php/articles/entry/despairing-about-climate-crisis [Accessed 9 July 2021].

Mowat, B. (2022) Climate Change on the Couch: How Psychotherapy can respond to the Climate and Ecological Emergency - and why it should. *AHPB Magazine for Self & Society* [online]. 8 (Winter 2022). Available from: https://ahpb.org/index.php/nl-2022-t8-02-climate-change-on-the-couch/?doing_wp_cron=1645518746.9510810375213623046875 [Accessed 22 February 2022].

Naess, A. (1989) *Ecology, community and lifestyle: Outline of an ecosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Nestor, R. (2021) *Working for fossil-fuel companies*. CPA Climate Crisis Digest [online]. December. Available from: https://climatepsychologyalliance/cpa-climate-crisis-digest-dec-2021?e=d296311105 [Accessed 1 December 2021].

Norgaard, K.M. (2011) *Living in Denial: Climate Change, Emotions, and Everyday Life*. Massachusetts: MIT Press.

Obradovich, N., Migliorini, R., Paulus, M.P. and Rahwan, I. (2018) Empirical evidence of mental health risks posed by climate change. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 115(43),* pp. 10953–10958.

Ockwell, D., Whitmarsh, L. and O'Neill, S. (2009) Reorienting Climate Change Communication for Effective Mitigation: Forcing People to be Green or Fostering Grass-Roots Engagement? *Science Communication* [online]. 30 (3), pp. 305–327. [Accessed 2 March 2023].

Office for National Statistics (2021) *Three-quarters of adults in Great Britain worry about climate change* [online]. Available from: https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/articles/threequa

rtersofadultsingreatbritainworryaboutclimatechange/2021-11-05 [Accessed 24 June 2022].

Ohly, H., White, M.P., Wheeler, B.W., Bethel, A., Ukoumunne, O.C., Nikolaou, V. and Garside, R. (2016) Attention Restoration Theory: A systematic review of the attention restoration potential of exposure to natural environments. *Journal of Toxicology and Environmental health part B.* 19 (7), pp. 305–343.

Ojala, M. (2012) How do children cope with global climate change? Coping strategies, engagement, and well-being. *Journal of Environmental Psychology* [online]. 32 (3), pp. 225–233. [Accessed 17 July 2023].

Ojala, M., Cunsolo, A., Ogunbode, C.A. and Middleton, J. (2021) Anxiety, Worry, and Grief in a Time of Environmental and Climate Crisis: A Narrative Review. *Annual Review of Environment and Resources* [online]. 46 (1), pp. 35–58. [Accessed 11 October 2022].

Ornstein, J. (2022) Psychoanalysts: The Climate Movement Wants YOU. *Psychoanalytic Dialogues* [online]. 32 (4), pp. 337–338. [Accessed 30 September 2022].

Padfield, L.R. (2021) On Disembodiment, Dissonance and Deprivation – Why Remote Psychotherapy in the Time of COVID-19 Is So Taxing. *Psychoanalysis, Self and Context* [online]. 16 (3), pp. 218–229. [Accessed 25 August 2021].

Parker, I. (2005) *Qualitative psychology. Introducing radical research*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.

Patton, M.Q. (2002) *Qualitative research & evaluative methods* 3rd edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Peirce, C.S. (1992) Deduction, induction and hypothesis. In: Houser, N. and Kloesel, C., eds. *he Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings – Volume 1 (1867–1893)*. Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press.

Pick I.B. (2013) Discussion. The Myth of Apathy: psychoanalytic explorations of environmental subjectivity. In: Weintrobe, S., ed. (2013) *Engaging with Climate Change: Psychoanalytic and Interdisciplinary Perspectives*. Hove: Sussex: Routledge, pp. 134–137.

Pihkala, P. (2022) The Process of Eco-Anxiety and Ecological Grief: A Narrative Review and a New Proposal. *Sustainability* [online]. 14 (24). [Accessed 2 February 2023].

Plumwood, V. (2009) Nature in the Active Voice. *Australian Humanities Review*. 46, pp. 113–129.

Randall, R. (2013) Great Expectations: The psychological dynamics of ecological debt. In: Weintrobe, S., ed. (2013) *Engaging with Climate Change: Psychoanalytic and Interdisciplinary perspectives*. Hove: Routledge, pp. 87–102.

Randall, R. (2009) Loss and Climate Change: The Cost of Parallel Narratives. *Ecopsychology* [online]. 1 (3), pp. 118–129. [Accessed 21 May 2023].

Randall, R. (2005) A new climate for psychotherapy? *Psychotherapy and Politics International* [online]. 3 (3), pp. 165–179. [Accessed 9 January 2020].

Ray, S.J. (2021) Climate Anxiety Is an Overwhelmingly White Phenomenon *Scientific American* [online]. Available from: https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/the-unbearable-whiteness-of-climate-anxiety/ [Accessed 13 September 2023].

Ray, S.J. (2020) *A field guide to climate anxiety : how to keep your cool on a warming planet*. Oakland, California: University of California Press.

Redman, P. (2016) Once more with feeling: What is the psychosocial anyway? *Journal of Psycho-Social Studies*. 9 (1), pp. 73–93.

Robertson, C. (2022) Climate psychology at a cultural threshold. In: Hollway, W., Hoggett, P., Robertson, C., and Weintrobe, S., eds. (2022) *Climate Psychology: A Matter of Life and Death*. Bicester: Phoenix Publishing House, pp. 69–95.

Rogers, C.R. (1961) *On becoming a person: A therapist's view of psychotherapy*. London: Constable.

Roszak, T., Gomes, M.E. and Kanner, A.D. (1995) *Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth, Healing the Mind.* San Francisco: Sierra Club Books.

Royal College of Psychiatrists (2021) *Position Statement PS03/21: Our planet's climate and ecological emergency* [online]. Available from: https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/docs/default-source/improving-care/better-mh-policy/position-statements/position-statement-ps03-21-climate-and-ecological-emergencies-2021.pdf [Accessed 24 June 2022].

Russell, G.I. (2018) *Screen Relations: The Limits of Computer-Mediated Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Rust, M-J. (2020) *Towards and Ecopsychotherapy.* London: Confer Books.

Saba, M. (2022) Climate Crisis and Psychoanalytic Responsibility: "There Is No Such Thing..." *Psychoanalytic Dialogues* [online]. 32 (4), pp. 346–347. [Accessed 30 September 2022].

Sachdev, D. (2021) Reclaiming Pleasure: When a good woman becomes a revolutionary. *Association for Psychosocial Studies Conference: Psychosocial Bodies.* Online, 1-2 July 2021. Unpublished paper.

Samuels, A. (2012) Letters to the Authors: Discussion of 'Subjective Experience, Collective Narratives'. In: Dimen, M., ed. (2012) *With Culture in Mind: Psychoanalytic Stories*. London: Routledge, pp. 163–179.

Samuels, A. (2006) Politics on the couch? Psychotherapy and society - some possibilities and some limitations. In: Totton, N., ed. (2006) *The politics of psychotherapy : new perspectives.* Maidenhead, Berkshire: Open University Press/McGraw-Hill Education, pp. 3–16.

Samuels, A. (2001) *Politics on the Couch: Citizenship and the internal life*. New York: Other Press.

Sarner, M. (2022) 'I was enjoying a life that was ruining the world': can therapy treat climate anxiety? *The Guardian* [online]. Available from: https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/apr/12/climate-anxiety-therapy-mental-health?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other [Accessed 12 April 2022].

Saunders, B., Sim, J., Kingstone, T., Baker, S., Waterfield, J., Bartlam, B., Burroughs, H. and Jinks, C. (2018) Saturation in qualitative research: exploring its conceptualization and operationalization. *Quality & Quantity* [online]. 52 (4), pp. 1893–1907. [Accessed 23 November 2023].

Scheuerman, W.E. (2022) "Political disobedience and the climate emergency". *Philosophy & Social Criticism* [online]. 48 (6), pp. 791–812. [Accessed 25 August 2022].

Schorn, A. (2000) The 'Theme-centered Interview'. A Method to Decode Manifest and Latent Aspects of Subjective Realities. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*. 1 (2).

Schweitzer, R.D., Glab, H. and Brymer, E. (2018) The Human-Nature Experience: A Phenomenological-Psychoanalytic Perspective. *Frontiers in psychology* [online]. 9. [Accessed 20 July 2021].

Scott, A. (2022) Building Resilience. *New Psychotherapist*. (81), pp. 30–34.

Seaman, E.B. (2016) *Climate change on the therapist's couch : how mental health clinicians receive and respond to indirect psychological impacts of climate change in the therapeutic setting* [online]. Masters Thesis, Smith College, Northampton, MA. Available from: https://scholarworks.smith.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2821&context=theses [Accessed 3 December 2021].

Searles, H. (1972). Unconscious processes in relation to the environmental crisis. *Psychoanalytic Review, 59*, pp. 361–374.

Searles, H. (1960). The nonhuman environment in normal development and schizophrenia. New York: International Universities Press.

Sehrbrock, J. (2021) Social Justice on the Couch: Collapse and Repair of Social Thirdness. *British Journal of Psychotherapy* [online]. 37 (4), pp. 673–689. [Accessed 5 October 2021].

Sell, C. (2022) Medio-Passive Agency in Psychoanalysis: Responding to Hopelessness and Despair in the Therapeutic Relationship. *Psychoanalytic Dialogues* [online]. 32 (4), pp. 353–368. [Accessed 1 October 2022].

Sheard, L. and Marsh, C. (2019) How to analyse longitudinal data from multiple sources in qualitative health research: the pen portrait analytic technique. *BMC Medical Research Methodology* [online]. 19 (1), p. 169. [Accessed 22 September 2023].

Shepard, P. (1982) *Nature and Madness*. San Francisco: Sierra Club.

Shove, E., Pantzar, M. and Watson, M. (2012) The Dynamics of Social Practice: Everyday Life and How it Changes [online]. London: SAGE Publications Ltd. [Accessed 15 December 2022].

Siegel, D. (1999) *The Developing Mind*. New York: Guilford Press.

Silva, J.F.B. and Coburn, J. (2023) Therapists' experience of climate change: A dialectic between personal and professional. *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research* [online]. 23 (2), pp. 417–431. [Accessed 5 February 2022].

Soutar, C. and Wand, A.P.F. (2022) Understanding the Spectrum of Anxiety Responses to Climate Change: A Systematic Review of the Qualitative Literature. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* [online]. 19 (2), p. 990. [Accessed 10 July 2023].

Spears, R. (2005) Where did Vincent's van go? *British Journal of Social Psychology* [online]. 44 (2), pp. 165–168. [Accessed 6 August 2021].

Spears, R., Hollway, W. and Edwards, D. (2005) Three Views on Hate. *The Psychologist*. 18 (9), pp. 544–547.

Spiliopoulos, G. and Timmons, S. (2023) Migrant NHS nurses as 'tolerated' citizens in post-Brexit Britain. *The Sociological Review* [online]. 71 (1), pp. 183–200. [Accessed 21 September 2023].

Spitzform, M. (2000) The Ecological Self: Metaphor and Developmental Experience? *Journal of Applied Psychoanalytic Studies*. 2 (3), pp. 265–285.

Stamenova, K. and Hinshelwood, R.D. (2018) Introduction. In: Stamenova, K. and Hinshelwood, R.D., eds. (2018) *Methods of Research into the Unconscious: Applying Psychoanalytic Ideas to Social Science*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, pp. 1–16.

Steiner, J. (2013) Discussion: Climate change in a perverse culture. In: Weintrobe, S., ed. (2013) *Engaging with Climate Change: Psychoanalytic and Interdisciplinary perspectives*. Hove: Routledge, pp. 80–83.

Stenner, P. (2014) Psychosocial: qu'est-ce que c'est? *Journal of Psycho-Social Studies*. 8 (1), pp. 205–216.

Stokes, B., Wike, R., and Carle, J. (2015) *Concern about Climate Change and Its Consequences* [online]. Pew Research Centre. Available from: https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2015/11/05/1-concern-about-climate-change-and-its-consequences/ [Accessed 12 October 2022].

Tait, A., O'Gorman, J., Nestor, R. and Anderson, J. (2022) Understanding and Responding to the Climate and Ecological Emergency: the Role of the Psychotherapist. *British Journal of Psychotherapy* [online]. 38 (4), pp. 770–779. [Accessed 14 November 2022].

Thomas, J. (2018) 'As easy as to know...': on the tensions between psychoanalysis and psych-social research. In: Cummins, A. and Williams, N., eds. (2018) *Further Researching Beneath the Surface (Volume 2): Psycho-social Research methods in Practice*. London: Routledge, pp. 3–25.

Totton, N. (2021) The Big Interview. *Therapy Today*. November 2021, pp. 27–30.

Totton, N. (2016) Let the right one in: talking about climate change in therapy *The Psychotherapist*. (63), pp. 15–16.

Totton, N. (2014) Embodiment and the Social Bond. In: White, K., ed. (2014) *Talking Bodies.* London: Karnac, pp. 41–64.

Totton, N. (2012) 'Nothing's out of order': towards an ecological therapy. In: Rust, M-J. and Totton, N., eds. (2012) *Vital Signs: Psychological responses to ecological crisis*. London: Karnac Books, pp. 253–264.

Totton, N. (2011) *Wild Therapy: undomesticating inner and outer worlds first*. Monmouth: PCCS Books Ltd.

Totton, N. (2006) The institutions of psychotherapy. In: Totton, N., ed. (2006) *The politics of psychotherapy: New perspectives*. Maidenhead, Berkshire: Open University Press, pp. 108–120.

Transition Network (2021) A Brief History of Transition. *Transition Network.org* [videocast]. November. Available from: https://transitionnetwork.org/about-the-movement/what-is-transition/history/ [Accessed 20 August 2021].

UKCP (2019) *UKCP Code of Ethics and Professional Practice*. Available at https://www.psychotherapy.org.uk/media/bkjdm33f/ukcp-code-of-ethics-and-professional-practice-2019.pdf [Accessed 30 November 2023].

UKCP (2016) Climate Change and Radical Hope. Summer 2016 (63).

Ulrich, R.S. (1984) View through a Window May Influence Recovery from Surgery. *Science*. 224 (4647), pp. 420–421.

United Nations (2021) Statements and Messages *Secretary-General Calls Latest IPCC Climate Report 'Code Red for Humanity', Stressing 'Irrefutable' Evidence of Human Influence*. 2021 [online]. Available from: https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/sgsm20847.doc.htm [Accessed 12 March 2022].

University of the West of England (2015) *UWE Code of Good Research Conduct*. [online]. Bristol: University of the West of England. Available from: https://www2.uwe.ac.uk/services/Marketing/research/pdf/UWE-Code-of-Good-Research-Conduct.pdf [Accessed 20 July 2021].

Weintrobe, S. (2021) *Psychological Roots of the Climate Crisis: Neoliberal Exceptionalism and the Culture of Uncare*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic.

Weintrobe, S. (2020) Moral injury, the culture of uncare and the climate bubble. *Journal of Social Work Practice* [online] 34 (4), pp. 351–362. [Accessed 20 July 2021].

Weintrobe, S. (2013a) Introduction. In: Weintrobe, S., ed. (2013) *Engaging with Climate Change: Psychoanalytic and Interdisciplinary Perspectives.* Hove: Routledge, pp. 1–15.

Weintrobe, S. (2013b) The difficult problem of anxiety in thinking about climate change. In: Weintrobe, S., ed. (2013) *Engaging with Climate Change: Psychoanalytic and Interdisciplinary Perspectives.* Hove: Routledge, pp. 33–47.

Wetherell, M. (2005) Unconscious conflict or everyday accountability? *British Journal of Social Psychology* [online]. 44 (2), pp. 169–173. [Accessed 6 January 2020].

Wengraf, T. (2018) Researching dated, situated, defended, and evolving subjectivities by biographic-narrative interview: psychoanalysis, the psycho-societal unconscious, and biographic-narrative interview method and interpretation. In: Stamenova, K. and Hinshelwood, R.D., eds. (2018) *Methods of Research into the Unconscious*. Oxon: Routledge, pp. 211–238.

Wengraf, T. (2001) *Qualitative Research Interviewing*. London: Sage.

Whitcombe, I. (2021) Is It Time to Abandon the Term "Climate Anxiety"? *Yes!* [online]. Available from: https://www.yesmagazine.org/environment/2021/08/31/climate-anxiety-mental-health [Accessed 7 October 2021].

Williams, N. (2021) *Mapping social Memory: A Psychotherapeutic Psychosocial Approach*. Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.

Williams, R. (1973) *The Country and the City*. London: Chatto & Windus.

Wilson, E.O. (1984) *Biophilia: The Human Bond with Other Species.* 1st edition. Cambridge M.A: Harvard University Press.

Windhorst, E. (2019) *Exploring the Ecological Self: An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis with Gifted Adults*. PhD, Brock University, Ontario, Canada.

Winnicott, D.W. (1971) *Playing and Reality* 1st edition. London: Routledge.

Worden, J.W. (2015) Theoretical Perspectives on Loss and Grief. In: Stillion, J. and Attig, T., eds. (2015) *Death, Dying, and Bereavement: Contemporary Perspectives, Institutions, and Practices*. New York: Springer Publishing Company, pp. 91–104.

Wotton, M. and Johnston, G. (2021) Embracing Challenge in Therapy. *Therapy Today*. (November 2021), pp. 35–39.

WWF (2018) *Half of plant and animal species at risk from climate change in world's most important natural places*. 2018 [online]. Available from: https://www.worldwildlife.org/press-releases/half-of-plant-and-animal-species-at-risk-from-climate-change-in-world-s-most-important-natural-places [Accessed 20 July 2021].

Zerubavel, E. (2006) *The Elephant in the Room: Silence and Denial in Everyday Life*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Zylstra, M., Knight, A., Esler, K. and Le Grange, L. (2014) Connectedness as a Core Conservation Concern: An Interdisciplinary Review of Theory and a Call for Practice. *Springer Science Reviews*. 2, pp. 119–143.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Privacy Notice for Research Participants

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 'Attachment, Ecological self and co-activism' research project. '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 Faculty of Health and Social Science at the University of the West of England. the ethics application reference number For queries, comments or complaints please email Alison Vaughton Alison.vaughton@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.

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. 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 2a: Client Participant Information sheet & Consent Form

My name is Trudi Macagnino and I am a post-graduate researcher at the University of the West of England. I am conducting a project into people's relationship with the natural world, particularly people who are having counselling or psychotherapy.

As you are currently receiving counselling and have shown an interest in this subject, I should like to invite you to take part in this study. Before you decide, please read the information below carefully. If you have any further questions after reading this, please feel free to talk to me directly or to contact me (details below).

Aims of the study

This study is part of a PhD research project exploring our relationship with the natural, nonhuman world. It will explore how people's relationship with the natural world has developed and changed over time, how it relates to mental health and people's behaviour regarding the environment. To help us answer these questions I will be conducting interviews with clients who are receiving counselling.

The PhD will be conducted over the next three years with a final review date of April 2023.

If you agree to participate you will be interviewed by me. The interview will be arranged for a mutually convenient date and location and is expected to take approximately one to two hours. A second interview may be needed two to four weeks later if I need to clarify any information. This could take place by telephone if necessary.

Ethics

The study had received ethical approval from the Faculty of Health and Social Science at the University of the West of England.

The project is being supervised by Dr Lita Crociani-Windland who can be contacted at lita.crociani-windland@uwe.ac.uk should further detail be needed of our ethical processes and procedures.

In the final report, you will be carefully anonymised and not personally be identified.

Why have I been asked?

I am interested in hearing the views of people who are currently receiving counselling for difficulties they are experiencing. You have shown an interest in the subject of my study and I would therefore like to invite you to take part. I shall only ask you questions about your relationship with the natural world in order to understand how this may relate to you. I will not ask you any questions related to your counselling or the specific issues you are seeking help with.

Do I have to take part?

You can decide not to take part. It is completely up to you to decide whether or not you want to be involved. If you do take part you can still decide later to withdraw your material from the study at any time up to 3 months following your interview. You are under no obligation to give a reason and there are no penalties. You can withdraw by simply emailing me.

What do I have to do if I agree to take part?

Please complete and sign the consent form that is attached and return it to me. I will then contact you to arrange a mutually convenient time and place to meet for the interview. The interview should last between one and two hours and will consist of open-questions exploring your relationship with the natural world. I am an experienced interviewer and am sensitive to the subject matter. I will also ask for some factual information such as age, gender and occupation. With your consent, the interview will be recorded and later transcribed so that I have a written account of the conversation. I will then read through this transcript to identify themes. During this phase of the research your anonymised transcripts may be read by other members of the research team within the university to verify the emerging themes. Your interview data will be analysed along with data from other client interviews.

How will my information be kept confidential?

After the interview the recorded audio files will be transferred to a password protected laptop and named using a code name to ensure anonymity. The resulting verbatim typed transcript will be labelled with the same code name and stored on the same password protected laptop. A backup copy of all data will be saved on the

password protected secure university ‘onedrive’ system. The audio recordings will be deleted when the research is ended, following submission of the PhD project.

Excerpts (quotes) of your interview may be used in the written report to illustrate the themes that emerge from the analysis. Any potentially identifying information e.g. addresses, names of relatives etc. will be removed from any quotes used to ensure anonymity.

Any disclosures which give cause for concern such as your safety, the safety of others, criminality or professional misconduct would be discussed with my supervisor and may have to be passed on to appropriate channels.

The interview data you provide will be kept separately from your signed consent form and contact details to ensure anonymity and there will be no link between them.

Consent forms will be scanned and saved to a password protected computer and backed up to the password protected university ‘onedrive’ filing system for storage. Only myself and my research supervisor will have access to the consent forms. The paper copy of the consent form, if applicable, will be shredded.

After the study is completed all email correspondence pertaining to the study will be deleted.

The anonymised transcript will remain in a data repository for a further 5 years following submission of the PhD project.

Are there any possible disadvantages to taking part?

It is possible that this process may evoke memories or feelings that are difficult or distressing. If you become distressed and want to finish, I will stop the interview. If you wish, we could then spend some time together making sense of this and thinking about what support might be useful to you after the interview.

Are there any possible benefits

Taking part in this research will give you an opportunity to talk about your experiences of nature. The act of talking freely about one’s experiences can in itself have positive effects on the participant. You may find it helpful to reflect in this way. However, there are no known specific benefits, such as payment, to taking part.

In terms of wider benefits it is anticipated that this study will help to shape my larger PhD project which I hope will provide a contribution towards understanding the human relationship with the natural world, especially at this time when we face serious challenges regarding the environment.

What will happen to the results of the study?

The results will be included in my PhD project together with other research data from other interviews.

Appendix 2b: Therapist Participant Information sheet & Consent Form

My name is Trudi Macagnino and I am a post-graduate researcher at the University of the West of England. I am conducting a project into therapists' experience of working with their clients' relationship with the natural nonhuman world.

As you are a therapist working in this way and have shown an interest in my study I should like to invite you to take part. Before you decide, please read the information below carefully. If you have any further questions after reading this, please feel free to talk to me directly or to contact me (details below).

A summary of the study

This study is part of a PhD research project exploring our relationship with the natural, nonhuman world. It will explore how people's relationship with the natural world has developed and changed over time, how it relates to mental health and people's behaviour regarding the environment. To help us answer these questions I will be conducting interviews with both therapists and clients who are receiving counselling.

The PhD will be conducted over the next three years with a final review date of April 2023.

If you agree to participate you will be interviewed twice by me. Interviews will be arranged for a mutually convenient date and location and are expected to take approximately one hour each. The interviews could take place outdoors if preferred such as a park. The second interview in order to explore certain themes further or to clarify information.

Ethics

The study had received ethical approval from the Faculty of Health and Social Science at the University of the West of England.

The project is being supervised by Dr Lita Crociani-Windland who can be contacted at lita.crociani-windland@uwe.ac.uk should further detail be needed of our ethical processes and procedures.

In the final report, you will not personally be identified. Any comments about your clients will also be carefully anonymised.

Why have I been asked?

You are being approached as I am interested in hearing the views of therapists who have an interest in the human relationship with the nonhuman environment, and an awareness of the role of the natural world when working with clients. I am aware that you may have this experience and interest. I shall only ask you questions about this aspect of your work.

Do I have to take part?

You can decide not to take part. It is completely up to you to decide whether or not you want to be involved. If you do take part you can still decide later to withdraw your material from the study at any time up to 3 months following your interview. You are under no obligation to give a reason and there are no penalties. You can withdraw by simply emailing me.

What do I have to do if I agree to take part?

Please complete and sign the consent form that is attached and return it to me. I will then contact you to arrange a mutually convenient time and place to complete the interviews. The interviews should last about an hour each and will consist of open-questions exploring your experience of your clients' relationship with the natural world. I will also ask for some demographic information such as age, gender, therapeutic orientation/professional accreditation and number of years working as a therapist. I am an experienced therapist and am sensitive to this particular subject matter. With your consent, the interview will be recorded and later transcribed so that I have a written account of the conversation. I will then read through this transcript to identify themes. During this phase of the research your anonymised transcripts may be read by other members of the research team within the university to verify the emerging themes. Your interview data will be analysed along with data from other therapist interviews.

How will my information be kept confidential?

After the interview the audio files will be transferred to a password protected laptop and named using a pseudonym to ensure anonymity. The resulting verbatim transcript will be labelled with the same pseudonym and stored on the same password protected laptop. A backup copy of all data will be saved on the password protected secure university 'onedrive' system. The audio recordings will be deleted and the transcript will be destroyed when the research is ended, following submission of the PhD project.

Excerpts of your verbatim material may be used in the written report to illustrate the themes that emerge from the analysis. Any potentially identifying information e.g. reference to specific training courses, influential people or place names will be removed from any quotes used to ensure anonymity.

Any disclosures which give cause for concern such as your safety, the safety of others, criminality or professional misconduct would be discussed with my supervisor and may have to be passed on to appropriate channels.

The interview data you provide will be kept separately from your signed consent form and contact details to ensure anonymity and there will be no link between them.

Consent forms will be scanned and saved to a password protected computer and backed up to the password protected university 'onedrive' filing system for storage. Only myself and my research supervisor will have access to the consent forms. The paper copy of the consent form, if applicable, will be shredded.

After the study is completed all email correspondence pertaining to the study will be deleted.

The anonymised transcript will remain in a data repository for a further 5 years following submission of the PhD project.

Are there any possible disadvantages to taking part?

It is possible that this process may evoke memories or feelings that are difficult or distressing. If you become distressed and want to finish, I will stop the interview. If you wish, we could then spend some time together making sense of this and thinking about what support might be useful to you after the interview.

Are there any possible benefits

Taking part in this research will give you an opportunity to talk about your experiences of working with your clients' relationship with the natural world. As you are aware the act of talking freely about one's experiences can in itself have positive effects on the participant. You may find it helpful to reflect on your practice in this way for instance. However, there are no known specific benefits, such as payment, to taking part.

In terms of wider benefits it is anticipated that this study will help to shape my larger PhD project which I hope will provide a contribution towards addressing a gap in psychoanalytic theory, with potential implications for how the human relationship with the nonhuman environment is understood, especially at this time when we face serious challenges regarding the environment.

What will happen to the results of the study?

The results will be included in my PhD project together with other research data from other interviews.

Appendix 2c: Activist Participant Information Sheet & Consent Form

My name is Trudi Macagnino and I am a post-graduate researcher at the University of the West of England. I am conducting a project into people's relationship with the natural world, particularly people who are environmental activists.

As you are an activist and have shown an interest in this subject, I should like to invite you to take part in this study. Before you decide, please read the information below carefully. If you have any further questions after reading this, please feel free to talk to me directly or to contact me (details below).

Aims of the study

This study is part of a PhD research project exploring our relationship with the natural, nonhuman world. It will explore how people's relationship with the natural world has developed and changed over time, how it relates to mental health and people's behaviour regarding the environment. To help us answer these questions I will be conducting a group activity with people who are environmental activists.

The PhD will be conducted over the next three years with a final review date of April 2023.

If you agree to participate you will be invited to take part in a group activity facilitated by me. The group will consist of 6-8 people and will be arranged for a mutually convenient date and location and is expected to take up to two hours.

Ethics

The study had received ethical approval from the Faculty of Health and Social Science at the University of the West of England.

The project is being supervised by Dr Lita Crociani-Windland who can be contacted at lita.crociani-windland@uwe.ac.uk should further detail be needed of our ethical processes and procedures.

In the final report, you will be carefully anonymised and not personally be identified.

Why have I been asked?

I am interested in hearing the experience of people who are currently environmentally engaged. You have shown an interest in the subject of my study and

I would therefore like to invite you to take part. I shall only explore your relationship with the natural world in order to understand how this may relate to you.

Do I have to take part?

You can decide not to take part. It is completely up to you to decide whether or not you want to be involved. If you do take part you can still decide later to withdraw your material from the study at any time up to 3 months after the group. You are under no obligation to give a reason and there are no penalties. You can withdraw by simply emailing me.

What do I have to do if I agree to take part?

Please complete and sign the consent form that is attached and return it to me. I will then contact you to join a group session. You may be invited to also bring along an object or image that conveys something about your relationship with the natural world. The group session should last up to two hours and will consist of participants simply making comments and sharing thoughts, memories, dreams and feelings relating to the natural world in response to images and objects in the room. Together we will identify themes that emerge in the group. I am an experienced therapist and facilitator and have been involved in environmental activism myself so am sensitive to the subject matter. I will also ask for some factual information such as age, gender and occupation. With the group's consent, the session will be recorded and later transcribed so that I have a written account of the session. During this phase of the research the anonymised transcripts may be read by other members of the research team within the university to verify the emerging themes. The group data will be analysed along with data from other groups.

How will my information be kept confidential?

After the session the recorded audio file will be transferred to a password protected laptop and named using a code name to ensure anonymity. The resulting verbatim typed transcript will be labelled with the same code name and stored on the same password protected laptop. A backup copy of all data will be saved on the password protected secure university 'onedrive' system. The audio recordings will be deleted and the transcript will be destroyed when the research is ended, following submission of the PhD project.

Excerpts (quotes) made by you during the group session may be used in the written thesis to illustrate the themes that emerge from the analysis. Any potentially identifying information e.g. addresses, names of relatives etc. will be removed from any quotes used to ensure anonymity.

Any disclosures which give cause for concern such as your safety, the safety of others, criminality or professional misconduct would be discussed with my supervisor and may have to be passed on to appropriate channels.

The group data will be kept separately from your signed consent form and contact details to ensure anonymity and there will be no link between them.

Consent forms will be scanned and saved to a password protected computer and backed up to the password protected university 'onedrive' filing system for storage. Only myself and my research supervisor will have access to the consent forms. The paper copy of the consent form, if applicable, will be shredded.

After the study is completed all email correspondence pertaining to the study will be deleted.

The anonymised transcript will remain in a data repository for a further 5 years following submission of the PhD project.

Are there any possible disadvantages to taking part?

It is possible that this process may evoke memories or feelings that are difficult or distressing. If you become distressed and want to finish, you can leave the session at any time. If you wish, we could then spend some time together afterwards making sense of this and thinking about what support might be useful to you.

Are there any possible benefits

Taking part in this research will give you an opportunity to talk about your experiences of nature. The act of talking freely about one's experiences can in itself have positive effects on the participant. You may find it helpful to reflect in this way. However, there are no known specific benefits, such as payment, to taking part.

In terms of wider benefits it is anticipated that this study will help to shape my larger PhD project which I hope will provide a contribution towards understanding the

human relationship with the natural world, especially at this time when we face serious challenges regarding the environment.

What will happen to the results of the study?

The results will be included in my PhD project together with other research data from other interviews.

Appendix 3a: Therapist FANI Interview Schedule

Themes:

- Client's relationship with nonhuman, natural world (their ecological self).
- Role of nonhuman natural world in the therapeutic process.
- The context of the environmental and ecological emergency.

Questions positioning the therapist

Can you tell me a little bit about your practice – where you work, your client group etc?

How would you describe yourself as a therapist? Modality?

How long have you worked as a therapist? What is your background?

First narrative questions:

1. Can you tell me about times with clients they have mentioned or talked about the natural nonhuman world?
2. Can you tell me about times with clients when they have mentioned or talked about issues such as climate change or environmental problems?
3. Can you tell me about how the natural, nonhuman world has impacted on your life?
4. Can you tell me about your feelings regarding environmental problems?

Potential prompts, following participant's narrative order and language:

What did they talk about? What happened? How was this explored?

What did you notice (about the client, about yourself)?

What do you think was happening (for the client, for you)/ How did you make sense of what was happening?

What were you thinking? What images, thoughts, associations were you having?

What were you feeling? What was the client feeling?

What did you do/want to do?

What reflections did you have about it afterwards?

Any other clients that come to mind?

Ending (neutral) question:

What's it been like for you thinking about your work in this way?

Appendix 3b: Client BNIM Interview Schedule

Themes:

- Client's relationship with nonhuman, natural world (their ecological self).
- Role of nonhuman natural world in the therapeutic process.
- The context of the environmental and ecological emergency.

Questions positioning the client

Can you tell me your age and occupation and where you live?

How long have you been in counselling/therapy with your current therapist?

Have you had counselling in the past?

SQUIN:

> *Can you tell me the story of the way in which the natural nonhuman world has been present in your life? All the events and experiences that are important for you personally. I'll listen, I won't interrupt. I'll just take some notes in case I have some questions for you afterwards. Take your time and begin wherever you like.*

Using BNIM Notepad to create sensory scenic reconstruction and push for PIN's:

Do you remember any particular times/ situations/ moments particularly strongly?

Any feelings, thoughts, images come to mind?

Where did it happen?

Additional Questions:

What are your thoughts and feelings regarding climate change and other environmental problems?

Can you tell me about times when you have talked about the natural world with a therapist?

Ending (neutral) question:

What's it been like for you thinking about the natural world in this way?

Appendix 3c: Eco-activist BNIM Interview Schedule

Themes:

- Triggers for engaging with activism
- Managing their feelings regarding CEE
- Impact of activism on their life and relationships

Questions positioning the therapist

Can you tell me a little bit about yourself – where you live, your age, occupation etc?

SQUIN:

> *Can you tell me the story of how you got involved with eco-activism? All the events and experiences that are important for you personally. I'll listen, I won't interrupt. I'll just take some notes in case I have some questions for you afterwards. Take your time and begin wherever you like.*

Using BNIM Notepad to create sensory scenic reconstruction and push for PIN's:

Do you remember any particular times/ situations/ moments particularly strongly?

Any feelings, thoughts, images come to mind?

Where did it happen?

Additional Questions

Can you tell me about how your life has been affected by your activism?

Can you tell me about times when you have spoken about your feelings regarding the climate and ecological crisis with a therapist or counsellor?

Potential prompts, following participant's narrative order and language:

What were you feeling? Thinking? What did you do? How did others react?

What has been the role of therapy in your activism?

How do you talk about your feelings with other activists?

Anything else that comes to mind?

Ending (neutral) question:

What's it been like for you talking about your activism in this way?

Appendix 4 - Interrogating the data reflexively and psycho-socially

What cultural discourses are evident or being drawn on?

What subject positions is the P/ am I being drawn into? (interpellation)

What are my thoughts, feelings, intentions? What am I trying to do?

What are my prejudices, assumptions, pre-understandings?

What fantasies are being used by the P/ by me and why?

What power dynamics are being played out?

What are the sociopolitical contexts? (Social thirdness)- Class, race, gender?

What is the role of a collective/social unconscious? (unthought known)

How is our relationship affecting the data?

What is the impact of the interview on me/on the P?

What defences are evident?

Appendix 5a - Themes, sub-themes and codes – Therapist Participants

How far can I go, should I go, do I want to go?								
Nature and Nurture			The Truth is out there			What is therapy for?		
1.1 Nature as medicine	1.2 Nature as a spiritual practice	1.3 Nature as an attachment relationship	2.1 Side-mentions	2.2 Covid has made us think	2.3 Feelings and defences	3.1 The client's issue	3.2 The therapeutic model	3.3 The organisation's goals
The outdoors is important for wellbeing. There is a peace in nature. Nature has a calming and relaxing effect. Nature provides space and freedom Nature important for self-care. Nature is nourishing. Nature sustains us.	There is a connection with all around us. Clients want a deeper connection with life. Nature has a perfection & purity. Every aspect of landscape has spirit & sentience Boundaries between self and nonhuman	Clients' special relationship with an aspect of nature. Nature is a place that feels safe. Feel supported and not alone in nature. Nature as generous and giving. Nature as a good parent/mother. Can trust and be held in nature.	Side-mentions of pro-environmental behaviours. More general awareness about CEE. Clients talk about nature even if not focus of the work.	Positive effect on environment of lockdown. People are more anxious about global issues because of Covid. Link between Covid and what is happening to the planet. Covid has confronted people with difficult issues.	It is too big to engage with. We are all avoiding it. Climate change is happening and can't be stopped. There is a lack of motivation to change. There is anxiety and fear. Big feelings:- helpless/sad/guilty/ angry/hopeless/ despair/overwhelm/ depressed. We are in the same boat. Don't want it to bother me.	Focus on client's immediate concerns. Client's lives are full of trauma. Clients are self-absorbed. Focus on the goal of therapy.	Important not to be directive. Training didn't include relationship with nature. Need a theoretical framework. Supervision focusses on psychotherapy part . Understanding of psychotherapy is too narrow. Nature as central element of therapy. Healing is about solving the problem.	Short-term work doesn't allow for exploration of relationship with nature. Have to use evidence based models. Pressure to achieve outcomes. Pressure to keep sessions to a minimum. The hospital environment is

Encourage client to explore relationship with nature.	dissolve/sense of oneness. Myths help us to connect to nature.				Don’t listen to fearful facts. You can’t change the whole world.		Hope is the first step to recovery.	very demanding.

Appendix 5b - Themes, sub-themes and codes – Client Participants

Nature is really important to me and it's being destroyed but I don't talk about it								
The natural world is an important part of my life			We've messed up			Therapy is about the small stuff		
1.1 Halcyon days of childhood	1.2 A key point in my life	1.3 Even now	2.1 Problems and solutions	2.2 Covid is connected	2.3 Feelings and defences	3.1 Others don't want to listen		3.2 Don't blame my therapist
Idyllic time in nature as a child. Playing in nature. Freedom and joy out in nature. Love of trees, rivers, animals. Spending time with family member(s). Freedom from responsibilities. Absorption in nature.	Significant experience in adolescence. Key relationship with an animal helped me grow. Nature saved my life. Specific trip had big effect. Nature helped me come to terms with tragedy and loss. Nature helped me to work things out. Ritual in nature to mark event.	Special relationship with an aspect of nature (trees. River, sea, woods). I feel calmer in nature. I spend time walking, swimming, camping, gardening.	Technology is disconnecting us from nature. Frustration with government. We need good paternal leadership. People create their own realities. Greed/money is the problem. Consumerism is the problem. Over-population is the problem. Toxins in the water. Cruelty to animals. Plastic is a problem.	Covid is the earth telling us off. Covid is making us re-think. Covid has made us value nature more. Covid has made us be more sustainable. Covid is the earth recorrecting itself. Covid is a re-direction. Covid is part of nature. Covid due to opening the rainforests.	Grief (disconnection with nature, loss of landscapes and species). Fear (Californian fires, it's too late). Anger (with government, plastic). Devastated. Horrified. Powerless / my actions won't make a difference. Feel the burden of responsibility. Guilt (not doing enough, leaving	People think it's a bit weird/roll their eyes. I don't talk to my therapist about it. Therapist might not listen/ value what I have to say/understand. Therapist cerebral. Others can't relate to it/ don't understand. People don't listen. Don't know where to begin. I don't want to depress others/ be too serious/ be controversial. I feel lonely because I can't share this. Feels like screaming and no-one can hear you.		I hadn't thought about using therapy in that way. I didn't think it was important. It is out of mind in therapy. Therapy is for personal problems/relationships/the past/other things. Environmental issues are technical rather than emotional. CEE is highbrow. Therapists give little prompts. Have talked about nature. I'm too messed up to talk about the big things.

			Destroying trees. We need to wake up/put the brake on/ re-think.		problems for future generations). Don't want to flop into grief. Compartmentalise feelings. Suppressing my passion. Have to find a balance between doing things that feel good but not numbing out. The earth will be fine without us/nature will fight back. I have to keep myself sane. Fascinated by CEE. Environmentalism is a trend. I have love. God will save us. Panic won't help. Pro-environmental behaviours (recycling,			Need to talk about the foundations first. Not blaming my therapist. Therapist advises me to spend time in nature. It's my responsibility to bring up what I want to talk about. Therapists aren't trained for this.

					saving water, ethical shopping)			

Appendix 5c Table of Themes, sub-themes & codes – Activists

The right thing to do		**Belonging**			**Transforming Feelings: 'It's too much to bear'**				
1.1 Political values	1.2 Spiritual/ philosophical values	2.1 Misfits & normals	2.2 Identity	2.3 Safe Community	3.1 People Power	3.2 object for my anger	3.3 Making Amends	3.4 The thrill of the ride	3.5 Therapy not relevant
Fracking	Druidry	Problems fitting in	Who I am	Support but has limits	A framework to follow	Society has let me down	Class privilege	Creativity	Not political
Power	Paganism	Crazy gang	My persona	Safe place	Hope	Government aren't doing enough	Western/white privilege	Self-expression	For personal stuff
Land-ownership	Life meaning & purpose	Weirdoes	A way of life	Like-minded	Inspiring	Other people not doing enough	Past actions	Excitement	It's narcissistic
Feminism	Animism	Ordinary people	My tribe	They get it	Mix of generations	Big companies are greedy	I should be doing more	Out of comfort zone	Therapists also stressed by it
Racism	Deep ecology	Rabid activists	Group culture	Camaraderie	Empowerment	Unsupported by workplace	Lifestyle	Disobedience	Didn't know there are therapists
Anti-war	Ethics		I can join this	Joining in	Invincibility	Opposing side		Fun	Would need a therapist who gets it
Anti-nuclear weapons	Living authentically		I want to be part of it	Togetherness	Fulfilment			Celebration	I don't need it
Anti-capitalism	Non-violent		Pride & honour	Friends	Encouragement			Scary	Nothing to offer me
Anarchy	Positivity		Self-doubt	I feel at home	Critical mass			Intense	Little faith in therapy
				Share feelings				Chaotic	

Democratic Radicalisation Taking a stand Amnesty Int. Environmental groups Social issues Challenge the system	Make the world a better place		Sacrifice	Acceptance Respected leaders & members	I'm inconspicuous Atmosphere Energising Motivating Doing & Achieving something			Warriors & heroes Addictive Negative impact on me Distracts from feeling	It's for others Ineffective Pointless Better alternatives Feelings are legitimate not pathological Negative experience

3.6 It's not always easy – impact on mental health, loss of income, effect of prison/fines, fear for physical safety, time and energy, trauma