“None of us are islands”: A thematic analysis of navigating emotional engagement with climate change through social relationships.

Sara Souissi

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Abstract

Background: Much existing research attempting to explain (in)action in the face of climate change constructs a false separation between individuals and society. A relational perspective is comparatively absent in existing research.

Aims: This qualitative study aimed to improve understandings of how individuals emotionally engaging with climate change experience their social relationships, and to explore the role of social relationships in individual and collective action in response to the climate crisis.

Methods: Data were collected during the COVID-19 pandemic via twelve remote semi-structured interviews with adults who self-identified as feeling emotionally affected by the climate crisis. Most participants also identified as activists. Sociograms were used as an elicitation tool enhancing reflection during interviews. Interview data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis to develop themes that could inform therapeutic practice and climate action.

Findings: Four main themes were developed with associated subthemes. The first theme related to personally sustainable climate activism and the vital role of supportive relationships within this. The second theme centred on the precarity of interpersonal emotional management when engaging with climate change and feeling isolated in the degree of one's emotional engagement despite support. The third theme focused on feeling the need to hide emotions and activity around climate change, and the relief of authentic relating when this is not required. The fourth theme highlighted climate engagement as a personal and relational journey, and how small changes can have possible wider effects through networks of social relationships.

Conclusions: Counselling psychology can play a meaningful role through emphasising this relational perspective. This includes highlighting the challenges and opportunities for people engaging emotionally with the climate crisis, and how personal relationships can inspire and sustain pro-climate action. The findings contribute to existing guidance for therapists and organisations supporting personally sustainable climate action.

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Literature Review and Study Rationale

Introduction

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (1992) defines climate change as "a change of climate which is attributed directly or indirectly to human activity that alters the composition of the global atmosphere and which is in addition to natural climate variability observed over comparable time periods" (p. 7). Although this definition highlights the anthropogenic (human-caused) aspects of climate change, it does not capture the threat regarding associated human and environmental impacts (McMichael et al., 2006; Reser & Swim, 2011). Many argue that climate change is the greatest threat facing humanity (Myers & Patz, 2009; Reese, 2016; Riemer & Reich, 2011). This research explores people's relational experiences of their emotional engagement with climate change. The reason for this focus is counselling psychology's relational emphasis of considering individuals within their social contexts, and the key role of emotions in climate change engagement (McAdam, 2017; Wolf & Moser, 2011).

This literature review will begin by examining the psychological relevance of the climate and ecological emergency (CEE). A definition of a 'relational perspective' will be outlined. Individualistic theories relevant to CEE engagement will be reviewed, and their limitations considered. Recognising the significance of emotions in CEE engagement, existing research in this area will then be explored. Shifting emphasis away from individualist conceptions to a psychosocial perspective (Hoggett, 2019) allows for a more relational understanding of the complexities of CEE engagement. This literature review will take an explicitly relational perspective on CEE engagement and discuss possible implications of CEE engagement for relationships. The potential contributions that counselling psychology can make to this research area will be considered. Finally, a summary of the study's rationale and aims will be outlined.

Psychological Relevance of Climate Change

Climate change due to human activities and emissions of greenhouse gases is already impacting weather and climate extremes in every global region, leading to adverse impacts on water and food security, economies, society, human health, and loss and damage to people and nature (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [IPCC], 2023). The psychological impacts of the CEE are direct, indirect, and psychosocial with disproportionate effects on the most marginalised in society (American Psychological Association [APA]/ecoAmerica, 2014, 2017; Cunsolo Willox et al., 2013; Doherty & Clayton, 2011; Hayes et al., 2018; Palinkas & Wong, 2020). Direct impacts include trauma from extreme weather events (Doherty & Clayton, 2011; Hayes et al., 2018). Indirect impacts include anxiety in relation to future risks (Doherty & Clayton, 2011), which can impact mental health and quality of life (Swim et al., 2011). Psychosocial impacts include large-scale social and community effects on interpersonal and intergroup relations due to direct climate changes affecting the habitability of certain regions (Doherty & Clayton, 2011).

These psychosocial impacts, such as displacement and forced migration due to climate change, also result in further negative psychological impacts (Berry et al., 2010). Floods, storms, or wildfires can displace families, with possible negative impacts on family relationships, separation from social support systems, and disruption to children's schooling (APA/ecoAmerica, 2017). Place attachment is likely to be disrupted, due to forced migration or fundamental changes in a place's ecology (Hess et al., 2008). Place attachment is defined as the relationship between individuals and their meaningful environments (Scannell & Gifford, 2010). Disruption to this relationship can be traumatic for individuals and communities, particularly indigenous communities (Hess et al., 2008). Forced climate migrants are inadequately protected by current international refugee and immigration policy (European Parliamentary Research Service, 2019; International Organization for Migration [IOM], 2008; 2019), despite the numbers likely to be displaced (IPCC, 1990; Warner et al., 2010). Research in communities with observable climate and environmental changes has identified the negative impacts on mental health, potential links with increased suicidal ideation and the increased need for counselling services in response to these changes (Cunsolo Willox et al., 2013). The

extent to which individuals and communities experience these numerous impacts is influenced by individual and contextual factors, such as having fewer social and economic resources (Swim et al., 2011).

Climate change mitigation and adaptation responses are increasingly recognised as relevant to the field of psychology (APA/ecoAmerica, 2014; Swim et al., 2011). Mitigation and adaptation are responses to expected and experienced climate change (Swim et al., 2011). Adaptation involves addressing psychological and social effects of both threat and consequences of the CEE (Swim et al., 2011). Psychologists' knowledge of human behaviour can help to improve understanding of the psychological responses and individual and interpersonal psychological processes involved in climate change (APA, 2010). Psychologists have an ethical responsibility to reduce psychological harm, to reduce global disparities in well-being, and to improve climate-related interventions (Doherty & Clayton, 2011). Although these ethical responsibilities are increasingly well-acknowledged, there is a need for concerted meaningful action from psychologists to improve climate-related interventions.

Climate change mitigation and adaptation needs to involve "rapid and unprecedented societal transformation" (IPCC, 2018, p. 77). Despite this call for rapid societal transformation, significant gaps remain between stated national ambitions and the necessary implementation of climate action (IPCC, 2023). This suggests that dominant models of climate inaction may not only be inadequate but may also be impeding the scale of change that is needed (Shove, 2010). The human dimensions of climate change are influenced by intra-individual processes and human systems (Swim et al., 2011). There is a need for research into psychological and social responses to climate change (Doherty & Clayton, 2011). It is difficult to actively engage with climate change, and pro-environmental engagement is shaped by many factors (Gifford & Nilsson, 2014). More research is needed on what enables people to engage cognitively, affectively, and behaviourally (Wolf & Moser, 2011), and on the psychosocial processes involved (Hoggett, 2019).

Towards a Relational Perspective on Climate Change Engagement

Existing theories regarding climate (in)action fail to form a comprehensive approach (Brulle & Norgaard, 2019), and often create a false dichotomy between individuals and society (Räthzel & Uzzell, 2009). Climate change engagement is defined as feeling personally connected to the issue of climate change (Wolf & Moser, 2011). However, there are individual and social barriers to engagement (Eom et al., 2018; Geiger et al., 2017; Lorenzoni et al., 2007). These barriers include psychological defence mechanisms and the constraints of social norms (Wolf & Moser, 2011). A relational perspective offers a framework to consider these processes of engagement and disengagement.

Relational thinking views patterns of thoughts, emotions and behaviours as directly related to patterns of interpersonal relationships (DeYoung, 2015). Considering infant development and attachment theory, relationships are formed before a sense of self is formed (Van Zomeren, 2014). A relational perspective is essential to counselling psychology, which views people as relational beings living in integral social, cultural, and historical contexts with which they interact daily (Douglas et al., 2016). This involves considering the operation of social power within these contexts (DeYoung, 2015). A relational approach includes moving between intra and interpersonal processes (Kuchuk, 2021), and considering unconscious dynamics (Curtis & Hirsch, 2003). A relational perspective views the search for relatedness with others throughout life as a key endeavour (Greenberg & Mitchell, 1983), and sees people as motivated to maintain important relationships and avoid social exclusion (Van Zomeren, 2014). The following section will start by considering issues with individualising CEE engagement, before then reviewing literature around emotions as key in CEE engagement.

Issues with Individualising CEE Engagement

This section will review existing individualistic perspectives on CEE engagement, focusing on broadly cognitive and behavioural aspects of this. Limitations of these perspectives will be discussed. The risk in overly focusing on individual behaviour change is the continued neglect of social policy and collective action (Berry et al., 2018). Climate change is a systemic issue and individuals are

limited in their ability to make pro-environmental behavioural choices (Berry et al., 2018), particularly those from disadvantaged groups who face more barriers related to time, money, information, and stress levels (Bell, 2020).

Individualist explanations for social change are often based on a form of ABC model (where A is values and attitudes, B is behaviours, and C is individuals' choices) (Shove, 2010). These ABC models are rooted in theories of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). The theory of planned behaviour conceptualises behaviour as guided by beliefs about the likely consequences of a behaviour, normative beliefs resulting in a perception of subjective norm or social pressure, and beliefs about factors present which might facilitate or impede the behaviour, giving rise to perceived behavioural control or self-efficacy (Ajzen, 1991). A key limitation with these models is that they assume people are 'rational actors' (Brulle & Dunlap, 2015) which neglects more complex implicit or unconscious processes. Although different versions of these models have expanded to try to take social factors into increased consideration, due to the complexity of human social life these models are unable to specify all influences on an individual's behaviours (Kasper, 2009). Despite calls for the theory of planned behaviour to be retired as it has limited predictive validity and does not account for most of the variability in observed behaviour (Sniehotta et al., 2014), extended versions of this model are still used in pro-environmental behaviour research (e.g., Liobikienė et al., 2021; Morten et al., 2018; Wolstenholme et al., 2021).

Early work on climate cognition identified that people often struggle to understand the physical mechanisms of climate change, are unaware of the dominant scientific consensus, and are confused about actions for effective mitigation (Van der Linden, 2017). However, individuals' beliefs influence the degree to which they pay attention to information or perceive it as relevant (Butts, 2016). Flawed cognitive models limit people's ability to grasp the reality of climate change, meaning that information is insufficient to produce action (Norgaard, 2009). For this reason, information deficit models of climate change inaction have been widely criticised (Owens & Driffill, 2008). Heuristics (mental shortcuts) are often adaptive, but there is a mismatch between the environments in which these heuristics evolved and modern global contexts (Van der Linden, 2017). However

social norms influence perception (Van der Linden, 2017), and the way highly disturbing information is processed and attended to is complex, and is embedded within social contexts (Norgaard, 2009).

Emotions Are Key in CEE Engagement

Emotional engagement is thought to be a critical link between understanding and behaviour (Wolf & Moser, 2011). Emotions are modes of relating to the environment and are dynamic features in ongoing exchanges with other individuals and relevant external events (Frijda & Mesquita, 1994). Early accounts of climate action did not assign emotions any explanatory power; however, there has been a move towards viewing emotions as not just a feature of emergent action but an essential causal component (Davidson & Kecinski, 2022; McAdam, 2017). Emotional engagement with climate change has also been shown to predict climate policy support (Wang et al., 2018). Emotions guide decision-making by allowing us to invest cognitive capacities in things that matter (Davidson & Kecinski, 2022). The following section will review existing literature regarding emotions and CEE engagement, starting with fear and worry, grief, interest and hope, and finally anger. An argument will then be made against the over-simplification of emotional experiencing, instead seeing emotions as complex relational experiences within sociocultural contexts. The role of emotion in action will be further considered. This section will end by cautioning against trying to 'fix' difficult emotions, instead seeing their value in guiding action.

There are contradictory findings on the role of fear in motivating CEE engagement. Van Zomeren et al. (2010) found that fear appeals (messaging about the CEE which raises fear intending to raise awareness and action) can increase individuals' intention to engage in environmental action. However, other research has found that more 'negative' emotions such as fear can make it more likely for individuals to disengage from the issue of climate change, unless these emotions are mitigated by how to use worry and concern to guide effective action (Wolf & Moser, 2011). Similarly, Smith and Leiserowitz (2014) identify worry as the strongest predictor for climate policy support, while fear was not associated with increased policy support. Worry has been a focus in recent CEE related research as

a potentially motivating emotional state (Bouman et al., 2020; Smith & Leiserowitz, 2014). It has been suggested that, although conceptually related, worry can be experientially differentiated from concern or more intense fear (Bouman et al., 2020). Emotional intensity can affect emotional regulation strategies, with fear being associated with employing distraction-focused coping (Argyriou & Lee, 2020). As worry is a less intense emotion than fear, it has been suggested that worry can motivate deeper cognitive and analytical processing of risk information (Smith & Leiserowitz, 2014). Although fear appeals can capture attention, they can result in activating internal fear controls such as denial and apathy which can act as barriers to meaningful engagement (O'Neill & Nicholson-Cole, 2009). Activating fear controls is a particular risk when individual or collective action is seen as too difficult (Smith & Leiserowitz, 2014), so external responses to fear are perceived to be unavailable (O'Neill & Nicholson-Cole, 2009). This suggests that worry may be more motivating than fear for pro-climate action.

Climate-related grief or anxiety about current or anticipated losses indicate a relationship with the natural world (Cunsolo et al., 2020). These feelings are a valid and natural response to ecological losses as these become a lived experience for more people (Comtesse et al., 2021; Cunsolo & Ellis, 2018). The main trigger for ecological grief seems to be actual physical ecological loss, which may lead to feelings of yearning accompanied by a weakened personal identity related to the lost ecosystem, landscape, or weather pattern (Comtesse et al., 2021). Grief tends to be associated with human losses, and losses beyond the human can be seen as outside of traditional grieving responses (Craps, 2020). The Remembrance Day for Lost Species, an annual event which takes place on the 30th of November, is an example of collective mourning that gives voice to the grief associated with mass multispecies extinction (de Massol de Rebetz, 2020). Although there is a comparative lack of research on the role of grief in motivating pro-climate action, naming forms of grief associated with environmental loss helps to bring them into societal awareness and gives them legitimacy, which may help the grief to be processed (Craps, 2020).

Emotions such as interest and hope can increase policy support (Smith & Leiserowitz, 2014). Hope seems to act as a motivator (Bury et al., 2020; Wolf &

Moser, 2011), and is associated with pro-environmental behaviour if denial of the seriousness of climate change is controlled for (Ojala, 2012). Hope is an emotion that has the power to increase support for social change, through enhanced efficacy beliefs and increased willingness to act when hope is experienced (Greenaway et al., 2016). Interestingly, hope can motivate action even when perceptions of success are low, particularly for those who are highly personally invested in the outcome (Bury et al., 2020).

Anger has also been associated with increased engagement in pro-climate behaviours (Stanley et al., 2021), and is an emotion through which protesters ascribe guilt to powerholders (Kleres & Wettergren, 2017). Importantly, Kleres and Wettergren (2017) highlight different emotional processes in climate activists in the Global North and Global South related to unequal impacts of the CEE and ascription of responsibility. Activists in the Global South have similar processes of hope, action, and fear; however, their acute paralysing fear is transformed by anger (Kleres & Wettergren, 2017). Many studies regarding the role of climate-related emotions in CEE action, including most of the studies above, have sampled participants from the Global North. It is crucial to consider that emotional processes of CEE engagement may differ within different sociocultural contexts, and that this may relate to immediacy and responsibility for CEE harms.

Although it is suggested that certain discrete emotions predict collective action and support for social change (Greenaway et al., 2016; Smith & Leiserowitz, 2014), there is disagreement on the role certain emotions might play. Stanley et al. (2021) argue that research into emotions and the CEE has tended to separate emotions into ‘positive’ or ‘negative’ emotions, and that increased differentiation is needed to consider how emotional responses relate to mental health outcomes and action. However, from an evolutionary perspective, neural affect systems are inherited while emotional experiencing is shaped by previous and current social contexts (Davidson & Kecinski, 2022). This means that different individuals can respond with different emotions to the same stimuli, and these emotions may be experienced or expressed in different ways. As emotional experiencing is shaped by social contexts, different emotions are likely to be motivating for different people. Conscious emotional experiencing, in relation to complex concepts such as climate

change, combines feeling states with cognitive appraisals of context, self and others and multiple potential motivations (Chapman et al., 2017). Therefore, despite calls for increased differentiation of emotions and their motivational power in relation to climate action, researching specific individual emotions divorced from their social contexts may not be that useful. Furthermore, treating emotions as discrete and easily separable mechanisms which directly cause particular behavioural responses is problematic (Chapman et al., 2017). In summary, some degree of personal emotional connection to the CEE and a sense of efficacy to move towards action is likely to be more important for pro-climate action.

When people have something to do to solve a problem, they are better able to move from painful emotions to empowerment (Fritze et al., 2008). Therefore, in addition to the evident importance of climate action to mitigate harms associated with the CEE, action could also be encouraged as a way of expressing emotional pain (Higley & Milton, 2008). Further to the importance of emotional engagement in bridging the gap between environmental understanding and pro-environmental action (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002; Whitmarsh & O'Neill, 2010; Wolf & Moser, 2011), an increased consideration of the role of social relationships in engagement with climate change could also help people to move towards action. An example of this is in Ojala and Bengtsson's (2019) research, which found that young people's perceptions of communication with friends and parents about societal problems and their emotional reactions to these problems influence environmental values and climate change coping strategies. These environmental values and coping strategies then impact on engagement in pro-environmental behaviour (Ojala & Bengtsson, 2019). Although a useful study in highlighting the importance of social networks for environmental values, coping strategies and environmental behaviour, this quantitative research was unable to capture the complexity of these relational experiences and processes.

Although there is an increased interest in and recognition of emotional responses to climate change, with increased use of terms like 'eco-anxiety' and 'ecological grief', it is important to be aware of the potential implications of using clinical language, as these might invite a response that treats the emotions themselves as problematic or pathological (Bednarek, 2019a). These feelings,

although uncomfortable, play an important role in inspiring people to act. It is important not to treat emotions that are viewed as 'negative' as an individual issue that needs to be fixed but instead to see the value in responses that signal that something is amiss (Bednarek, 2019a; Cunsolo et al., 2020). Safe spaces are needed to explore these difficult feelings (Cunsolo et al., 2020).

Individuals Embedded in Their Social Contexts

Climate change is a collective problem, and individual processes of CEE (in)action are embedded in social processes. Individuals' thoughts, feelings and behaviours are influenced by others more than is often recognised (Jost et al., 2008). Individual action often refers to individual-level approaches to motivation used in the environmental and collective action literature, while collective action refers to group-level approaches (Van Zomeren, 2014). There is agreement that system-wide changes are needed to tackle the challenges posed by the CEE (Bamberg et al., 2015). Collective action is seen as a fundamental mechanism in social transformation (Bamberg et al., 2015), and is one of the most important ways that individuals can have an impact on climate change (Clayton et al., 2015). However, there are some situations where known motivating factors are present and traditional forms of collective action (such as protesting, demonstrating, or signing petitions) do not occur (Stroebe et al., 2019).

Considering the value of collective action in response to the CEE, it is important to recognise the varying social contexts and forms of collective which individuals are embedded in. This includes groupings and latent networks, which are types of collectives that are mostly overlooked; however, all are significant for large-scale social change (Welch & Yates, 2018). Groupings do not engage in management or have formal bureaucracy like bureaucratic organisations do, but they can be capable of engaging in practices and strategy towards collective objectives (Welch & Yates, 2018). Latent networks are people who share a common activity; they may not explicitly identify each other as co-members in a significant shared mission, but in combination, they have shared outcomes (Welch & Yates, 2018).

Politics and contemporary events also form a key part of the wider contexts of individuals, even if post-political climate change discourses might serve to obscure the political nature of this issue and the power dynamics at play (Kenis, 2019). Socio-political variables such as values, worldviews, and political orientation play an important role in climate change perception (Poortinga et al., 2019). The Overton Window can be a useful concept in considering the range of political ideas considered currently acceptable by the mainstream in relation to the CEE (Weintrobe, 2021).

Opinions of other people, groups and institutions form part of the social structure in which activists operate (Hartley et al., 2016). The degree of 'real' or perceived agreement in certain social contexts influences the likelihood that someone will engage in face-to-face or online group-based actions (Hartley et al., 2016). Broader perspectives which still capture the importance of collective action and collective identity include the concepts of opinion-based groups (McGarty et al., 2009), and of ingroup-oriented action (Stroebe et al., 2019). Opinion-based groups hold a social identity which is defined by a shared opinion, and members of opinion-based groups have the potential to take collective action in certain circumstances but only a fraction of the membership is likely to have been involved in organising the action and activist groups often emerge from opinion-based groups (McGarty et al., 2009). Ingroup-oriented action focuses on providing support to the collective and can be crucial in building group identity, and a prerequisite for more outgroup-focused actions (Stroebe et al., 2019).

Although there is much support in the literature for collectivistic predictors of collective action (such as group-based emotions, identification with the relevant group, and group efficacy), these models often neglect individualistic predictors of collective action (Van Zomeren, 2014). There is disagreement around definitions of individual and collective action (Wright, 2009), and much research into climate engagement constructs a false separation between processes of individual and collective action (Van Zomeren, 2014). It is evident that existing CEE research entrenched in either individualistic or collectivistic assumptions is offering only a partial view of these processes of engagement.

Relational Processes of Climate (In)action

There is value in integrative models and theories which acknowledge that there are more than solely intrapsychic factors involved in climate engagement. Relational and ecopsychology perspectives offer the possibility of more integrative frameworks allowing for a consideration of individual practices as reciprocally rooted in relational and social contexts (Adams, 2012). This section will review theories considered compatible with a more integrative relational perspective of climate (in)action.

Support from social networks affects individual behaviour, as individuals are more willing to make a certain behaviour their own when relevant and trusted social groups promote and approve of the behaviour (Renn, 2011). The more important social referents, such as family and friends, recognise and act on the risk of climate change, the more this amplifies an individual's risk perception (Van der Linden, 2015). Part of this process includes how emotions spread through social modelling and networks (Stoll-Kleemann & O'Riordan, 2020). Social norms can develop through social networks, such as neighbourhoods and workplaces (Gifford, 2011). Social norms are interactional rather than static perceptions, and it can be useful to consider the ways that norms are interpersonally regulated through everyday interactions (Steentjes et al., 2017). Aligned and activated social norms can have a powerful influence on human decision making, and both descriptive and prescriptive norms influence climate change risk perception (Van der Linden at al., 2015). Descriptive norms refer to the extent that relevant others act to reduce climate change risks, while prescriptive norms refer to the extent that an individual experiences social pressure to view climate change risk as requiring action (Van der Linden, 2015).

Social norms have a double-edged power though, as there can be competing norms around anti-climate and pro-climate behaviour (Gifford, 2011). Responding to climate change challenges social norms related to energy use and carbon-dependent lifestyles (Lorenzoni et al., 2007; Swim et al., 2011), so there is an increased likelihood of resistance to implementing the changes necessary to reduce energy consumption (Wolf & Moser, 2011). Individuals' beliefs shape communicative behaviour and can produce biases at group level (Butts, 2016).

These biases can arise when group members incorrectly believe themselves to be unusual in violating a group norm therefore concealing their attitudes and behaviour from others in the group which reinforces this belief (Butts, 2016). Collective unwillingness to express disapproval of environmentally harmful behaviour may be inhibiting more widespread social change, which helps to explain the maintenance of the environmentally harmful status-quo (Steentjes at al., 2017). However, more information is needed about the process of norms crossing over normative tipping points (Steentjes et al., 2017).

Social identity is also an important driver of collective climate action (Bamberg et al., 2015). Social identity theory outlines how individuals strive for a positive social identity that is based to a large extent on distinctiveness and favourable comparisons, which can be made between an individual's in-group and relevant out-groups; where social identity is unsatisfactory, individuals strive to leave their existing group or make their group more positively distinct (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Drawing on social identity theory, Smith et al. (2015) propose that under certain conditions, new shared identities based on norms for social change can emerge from social interactions about perceived discrepancies between an undesirable descriptive norm (the way world is) and desired injunctive norm (the way the world should be). Consequently, social norms can both facilitate and impede engagement with climate change in different contexts (Steentjes et al., 2017). Therefore ingroup-oriented action, such as sharing of experiences and formation of shared social identities, can be an important antecedent to mobilisation (Stroebe et al., 2019). However, failure to respond to climate change is based in social processes which maintain and reproduce social stability, as climate change challenges this social order (Brulle & Norgaard, 2019). These processes help people in wealthy nations to continue benefiting from their denial while maintaining a favourable view of the self through cognitive dissonance (Norgaard, 2009).

The concept of 'ecological habitus', drawing on social practice theory, emphasises a relational process approach (Kasper, 2009). This concept of ecological habitus refers to a durable yet changeable system of dispositions, perceptions, practices, and material conditions that can be viewed as a lifestyle, which is shaped

by and shapes socioecological contexts (Kasper, 2009). In other words, an ecological habitus would produce more environmentally-sound lifestyle practices which would become routinised within a particular place (Haluza-DeLay, 2008). An example of an embodied ecological habitus is how recycling has become completely integrated into many people's life habits, rather than a rational calculation of interest or an expression of collective identity (Haluza-DeLay, 2008). The utility of the concept of ecological habitus is that it shifts away from models of individual climate (in)action towards considering the importance of material and social structures. It can be useful though to consider individual behaviour as well as social practices, as this can indicate which performances of social practices might be possible in similarly structured environments (Howell & Allen, 2017).

More research is needed on inaction as an active process, driven by individual-level social-psychological processes, and cultural and political-economic contexts (Gunderson et al., 2020). Through examining action relationally, this could help in developing understandings of these processes of climate (in)action. Climate change is seen by many as subjectively irrelevant or an issue at the intellectual level (Ollinaho, 2016), which means drivers of climate change are reproduced in daily life (Gunderson et al., 2020). Risk perception affects decision-making, and individuals interpret information about climate change through social processes affected by their sociocultural context and worldviews (Dash & Gladwin, 2007; Wolf & Moser, 2011). It is important to consider not only individual psychological aspects but also the social component of human responses to climate change to develop a more integrated understanding of how this impacts perceptions and behaviours (Clayton et al., 2015). Research is needed on the circumstances which encourage individuals to act alone or collectively (Clayton et al., 2015).

Considering this in relation to power, politics and current economic systems, a more critical perspective is needed to shift the focus to support community efforts and activism as a form of pro-environmental behaviour (Adams, 2021). Prosocial behaviour can be conceptualised as part of an ongoing process of interpersonal and intergroup relations (Penner et al., 2005). Encouraging the development of communities with high levels of prosocial behaviour can help to prevent psychological difficulties (Biglan & Hinds, 2009), and can encourage a

cultural shift from materialism towards sustainability (Biglan, 2016). Materialism is defined as the value placed on acquiring and possessing material objects (Burroughs & Rindfleisch, 2002). Further research is needed on the effects of prosocial actions on social relationships (Penner et al., 2005), including climate activism as a prosocial behaviour aimed at benefiting society (Sanderson & McQuilkin, 2017). In addition to the importance of social relationships in climate mitigation, connectedness to family, community, place, and culture can help individuals to prepare for and recover from climate change-related trauma, and strong social networks can help to protect against some of the anticipated impacts (APA/ecoAmerica, 2017).

Implications of CEE Engagement for Relationships

Climate engagement is a process, and there is a period of adjustment when people first start to engage emotionally with the topic of climate change (Randall, 2009). This engagement can generate unpleasant emotions, including fear, guilt and helplessness (Norgaard, 2006a). A critical psychology perspective argues for increased social and cultural acknowledgement of these profound emotional responses, and views these as embedded in interpersonal, community, and wider structures affected by power and resistance (Adams, 2021). Despite engagement with climate change generating a range of emotions, levels of concern about climate change does not seem to correspond with how often it is discussed in everyday social interactions (Leiserowitz et al., 2019; Steentjes et al., 2017). Individuals can experience difficulties in social contexts with others who are not similarly engaging with the issue of climate change (Randall, 2009).

Difficulties in social interactions when engaging with the CEE can be considered as a form of socially organised denial (Norgaard, 2006b) in response to ‘negative’ emotions that go against sociocultural emotion norms (Norgaard, 2006a). Emotional experience and expression can be shaped by sociocultural norms, through socially shared meanings attached to specific emotions (Frijda & Mesquita, 1994). An example of this is how emotion norms in Norway of being optimistic and maintaining control conflict with the experience of fear and helplessness, leading people to employ emotion management strategies such as controlling exposure to

information (Norgaard, 2006a). Movement non-participation in response to climate change is actively produced through social processes (Norgaard, 2006a). Unconscious processes such as denial or projecting unwanted feelings can occur within social systems to protect individuals or groups from experiencing distress or anxiety (Caputo & Tomai, 2020). Emotion norms reflect and maintain the social structures in which they emerge (Thoits, 2004), and can function as regulators of social relationships (Frijda & Mesquita, 1994). As a result of this, individuals who deviate from sociocultural emotion norms are often stigmatised (Thoits, 2004). However, through deviating from emotion norms individuals can become agents of social change (Thoits, 2004). Randall (2009) has outlined the importance of support structures for the processing of emotional responses to climate change to help guide action.

Personal consequences of activism have been relatively neglected, as much research has focused on motives of engaging in collective action (Vestergren et al., 2017). A systematic review into consequences of activist participation has identified formation of new relationships or the erasure of previous relationships, however these existing studies have overwhelmingly focused on outcomes of participation rather than underlying processes of these relational changes (Vestergren et al., 2017). It is also important to consider the role of an activist identity in relation to social identity formation. Activists can be defined as people who actively work for political or social causes, including encouraging others to support those causes (Curtin & McGarty, 2016). Many people involved in mass movements and group-based actions would not subjectively identify as activists, and might actively reject the label (McGarty et al., 2009). This could be related to activists sometimes being associated with negative stereotypes, which can lead to others wanting to distance themselves from individuals who may be perceived negatively by society (Bashir et al., 2013). This stigmatisation of activist identities could be seen as part of processes across individual, institutional, and societal levels which act to maintain existing social practices and sociocultural stability in the face of the CEE as a cultural trauma (Brulle & Norgaard, 2019). For example, Diprose et al.'s (2017) research explored how climate justice activists in Aotearoa New Zealand were framed as 'disrespectful', 'young', 'unemployable' and 'irresponsible' by the police, media

reports and some members of the public. These framings served to pitch activists against bank customers inconvenienced by the activists' actions, instead of against the broader capitalist institutions and economic structures investing in and profiting from fossil fuels. This can reduce engagement of members of the public and reduce their motivation for social change (Bashir et al., 2013). This illustrates how, through stigmatising activist identities, existing power structures are upheld and the status quo is maintained.

Rationale for the Current Study

Despite calls for a relational perspective on pro-climate action (Van Zomeren, 2014), there are currently comparatively few studies that explicitly employ this relational perspective in the climate action literature. A systematic review of climate change research in social psychology publications has identified a lack of qualitative research in the field, a lack of consideration of mutually influencing personal relationships, and a lack of attention to how people in different forms of relationship cope with the impacts of the CEE (Tam et al., 2021). Empirical findings related to relational perspectives on activism or collective action have often not been focused on a climate engagement context, but were focused on other social justice issues (Van Zomeren, 2019). Therefore, the current study set out to investigate climate engagement more broadly including relational experiences of climate engagement.

Contexts of individual participation, such as the development of relationships between individuals, are important in sustaining participation in community organising (Christens & Speer, 2011). Methods that capture context help to consider more effective ways of intervening at family, neighbourhood, and organisational levels (Luke, 2005). Research that involves analysing social networks can be useful in considering how social networks influence people. However, ego-centric networks from the perspective of a single member have been criticised as not representative of a 'real' complete network (Luke, 2005). Van Stekelenburg et al. (2009) argue that as people live in a perceived world, people's perceptions of their context are more important than the context itself. This is due to perceptions shaping mental models about a perceived or ideal social world, and these mental

models can influence the reasons people participate in protest (Van Stekelenburg et al., 2009). Further research is needed on psychological mechanisms involved in the influence of social context (Hartley et al., 2016). Existing research into social networks has investigated areas such as how information about climate adaptation spreads through social networks (Cunningham et al., 2016) and likelihood of protest participation more broadly (Schussman & Soule, 2005). However, research into flow of information and practices through social networks neglects complex intersecting structural, relational, and individual influences (Hamilton et al., 2019). Therefore, qualitative research exploring experiences of social networks in more depth is needed to further understand the role of social relationships in processes of CEE engagement and action.

Small-scale qualitative in-depth methodologies such as semi-structured interviews can offer insights into how individuals engage with climate change that cannot be gained from large-scale surveys (Wolf & Moser, 2011). While wider social processes are implicated in climate change responses, a relational view retains the importance of personal relationships as essential for provoking social change (Jamieson, 2019). Investigating engagement with climate change through a relational, systemic lens helps to situate individuals within their contexts. This fits with counselling psychology's relational focus (Milton, 2016) and is in line with counselling psychology's responsibility to facilitate systemic and social change (Kennedy & Arthur, 2014).

As climate change is a shared problem with daunting challenges, psychologists can be more effective if psychological research is connected to constructs across other disciplines (Swim et al., 2011). A relational perspective facilitates theoretical integration across disciplines (Van Zomeren, 2016). One benefit of considering concepts across disciplines is that different fields focus on different levels of analysis (Swim et al., 2011). There is an increased recognition of the relevance of climate change to counselling psychology, including the establishment of the British Psychological Society's [BPS] Division of Counselling Psychology Working Group on Climate Change. It is important for psychologists to take a more active role in responding to the CEE through research and practice (Gimalova & Milton, 2019). Therefore, the current study sought to address these

identified gaps in the literature by taking an explicitly relational stance on climate engagement: both through exploring how people manage the emotional impacts of climate engagement within their relationships and through considering the role of social relationships in climate engagement processes.

Aims and Objectives

The research aimed to explore the following two research questions:

1. How does engaging emotionally with climate change impact on social relationships?
2. How do social relationships affect the ways in which individuals engage with climate change?

This qualitative study aimed to explore how social relationships affect and are affected by an individual's emotional engagement with climate change. This study was not trying to measure cause and effect in service of a particular outcome. Instead, it was focused on exploring the relational processes involved in committing to engage with and prioritise the CEE. This shifts from a cause-and-effect perspective on relationships, to considering instead co-constitution through embedded processes of relating (Gergen, 2009).

An objective of this research was to contribute to guidance for therapists to more effectively support clients who are engaging with climate change and who are experiencing 'eco-anxiety' (Kelly, 2017), ecological grief (Cunsolo & Ellis, 2018) or trauma (Gifford & Gifford, 2016). Another objective for the study was to share the key findings with organisations who are campaigning for improved responses to the CEE. This study could also have the potential to add to existing research related to reducing harms associated with climate change through improving mitigation and adaptation responses. This aligns with counselling psychology's commitments to social justice and to meet people's wider psychological needs (BPS, 2018).

This chapter has outlined relevant existing literature regarding engagement with the CEE, considering the role of social relationships within this. This has included identifying that further qualitative research is needed into people's

experiences of their relational contexts while engaging with the CEE. This study's research design and methodology will be presented in the following chapter.

Methodology

This chapter details the research design and rationale for methodological choices. The research instruments and the basis of their use will then be discussed, before moving on to outline the data collection methods and procedures of the research. This chapter ends with the researcher reflexively considering her own positioning and perspectives in relation to the research topic and the participants.

Design

Theoretical Framework

This study explored the relational experiences of people engaging emotionally with climate change. Due to this focus on subjective experience, this was a qualitative study using experiential reflexive thematic analysis (TA; Braun & Clarke, 2006). The sociocultural aspects of climate change perception positioned this research within a critical realist ontology, as participants' lived experiences of climate change are shaped by culture, language, and politics (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The political dimension and significance of contemporary debates will be reflected on further in the reflexivity section of this chapter.

Rationale for Chosen Methodology

Qualitative Design. A qualitative research design was chosen over a quantitative or mixed methods design as this was most suited to the research aims and questions. The research aims were focused on exploring the relational processes involved in climate change engagement. Qualitative methodologies tend to be concerned with meanings and processes, rather than predicting outcomes (Willig, 2013). Qualitative methodologies are also particularly well-suited to research that pays close attention to interpersonal issues (Yardley, 2000). A quantitative or mixed methods design focused on measuring cause and effect between variables within positivist or post-positivist assumptions (Braun & Clarke, 2021) may have offered more generalisable results (Winter, 2000). However, existing research on climate engagement has been largely quantitative (Wolf &

Moser, 2011). As this research focused on gaining rich understanding of contextualised meanings and experiences, this fit best with research conducted within a solely qualitative paradigm (Braun & Clarke, 2021). This qualitative paradigm can also be referred to as a 'Big Q' framework (Kidder & Fine, 1987). Qualitative methodologies are diverse, with a pluralist ethos underpinning most qualitative research (Yardley, 2000). Counselling psychology embraces working with pluralism and complexity (Kasket, 2012).

Ontology. A critical-realist ontological position underpins this research. Critical realism is situated between realism and relativism on an ontological continuum and suggests that a pre-social reality exists, but it is only ever partially knowable (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Critical realism can be thought of as a contextualised version of realism as it suggests that a version of reality exists, but understandings and experiences of reality are mediated by culture and language (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Critical realism is not homogenous and there are different variations (Danermark et al., 2005). A critical realist perspective proposes that data need to be interpreted to deepen an understanding of the factors or forces beyond an individual's control or awareness, such as social or psychological forces (Willig, 2013). Taking a critical realist position for reflexive TA means data allow the researcher to access a mediated reflection of participants' interpreted situated realities, which the researcher then interprets through the lens of their own cultural memberships (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Critical realism can be useful for analysing social problems and considering solutions for social change (Fletcher, 2017).

Epistemology. A contextualist epistemology views knowledge and human beings who create it as contextual, partial, and perspectival (Braun & Clarke, 2021). A contextualist epistemology emphasises the co-production of meaning through the relationship between participant and researcher. A contextualist view of knowledge is that it is relative as it relates to action within specific socio-cultural and historical contexts, and that it is incomplete as these contexts form a continuously changing reality (Jaeger & Rosnow, 1988). As a contextualist perspective views results as varying depending on the context of data collection and analysis (Madill et al., 2000), reflexivity is essential in considering how the research context and researcher shape the knowledge produced (Braun & Clarke,

2021). All participant or researcher perspectives are seen as subjective and not necessarily invalidated by conflicting or alternative versions (Madill et al., 2000). However, there may be some accounts which are more valuable in relation to the research questions or more persuasive than others (Madill et al., 2000).

Researcher subjectivity in a contextualist analysis requires the researcher to articulate their perspective and positioning (Madill et al., 2000). This is to enable the audience to assess the extent of shared basic cultural assumptions between researcher and participants, and the effect of this on the data and its analysis. This is not to reduce 'bias' as would be a concern in more realist or positivist approaches (Braun & Clarke, 2021), as a contextualist analysis views personal and cultural perspectives of the researcher as inevitably relevant to the research project (Madill et al., 2000). Bringing these perspectives and shared humanity through a common cultural understanding is seen instead as an important analytic resource. These values of humanism and subjectivity are integral to the profession of counselling psychology (Orlans & van Scoyoc, 2009). Contextualism can fit with a critical realist ontology as although data analysis is viewed as subjective and partial, the data are seen as possibly revealing underlying social practices (Braun & Clarke, 2021). This differs from more constructionist approaches, as there is a sense of a reality underlying these contextually produced accounts. A contextualist epistemology fits with the research questions, as individuals are seen as participating in the construction of contexts while also being affected by their consequences, therefore changing or developing through this process (Jaeger & Rosnow, 1988).

Reflexive Thematic Analysis. Braun and Clarke's (2019) reflexive TA was chosen over other methods due to the focus on identifying patterns of meaning across the dataset. As reflexive TA is a method rather than a methodology, its theoretical flexibility allows for its use within different ontological and epistemological frameworks (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This flexibility allowed for continual choices to be made about the approach to the data and its analysis. This fits with qualitative research carried out with a qualitative sensibility (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Reflexive TA allows for inductive or deductive generation of themes, and semantic or latent interpretations of the data. Reflexive TA consists of six phases (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which will be detailed later in this chapter. A

strength of reflexive TA is that it can be used to produce actionable outcomes that can inform policy development (Braun & Clarke, 2021). This could help promote social justice, which is key to the value base of counselling psychology (Division of Counselling Psychology, 2020). Two main alternative approaches were considered - this included Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith, 1996) and pattern-based discourse analysis (Wetherell, 1998; Willig, 2013).

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA; Smith, 1996) was considered as an alternative methodology, due to the research's broad focus on participants' experiences. IPA is concerned with examining how people make sense of experience (Smith et al., 2009). IPA is phenomenological, as it explores experience in its own terms. Two key differences between reflexive TA and IPA include a difference in analytic focus and a difference in analytic procedures (Braun & Clarke, 2020a). IPA has a dual focus, initially taking a detailed idiographic approach focusing on unique features of each case, before then looking at themes across cases (Braun & Clarke, 2013, 2020a). Thematic analysis was chosen as the focus was on identifying themes across the data, not within individual cases (Braun & Clarke, 2020a). A further consideration was the use of small homogenous samples with IPA to examine convergence and divergence within the sample (Smith et al., 2009). Thematic analysis was more suited to this research, due to the aim to access diverse experiences through a larger, more heterogenous sample (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Additionally, there can be a lack of clarity or emphasis around the role of the sociocultural context in IPA (Braun & Clarke, 2013). In contrast, the flexibility of TA enables a focus on individual experiences situated within wider sociocultural contexts and norms (Braun & Clarke, 2020a).

Another approach which focuses on analysing patterns of meaning across a dataset includes pattern-based discourse analysis (DA; Braun & Clarke, 2020a). Pattern-based DA is less widely used in counselling and psychotherapy research compared to IPA or TA, and is a critical qualitative approach which views language as a social practice (Braun & Clarke, 2020a). The focus in DA is primarily on the effects of language. Although the sociocultural aspects of climate change engagement were considered in the research, the research aims were primarily

experiential and relational rather than discursive. The flexibility of TA enabled a consideration of the role of social context while exploring relational experiences.

Data Collection

Development of the Research Instrument

Semi-Structured Interviews. Emotional engagement with climate change is a complex topic. A range of data collection methods were considered. Semi-structured interviews were selected, as this conversational method of data collection suited the complexity of experiences of climate change (Hoggett, 2019). Semi-structured interviews facilitate the flexible collection of rich, detailed data about experiences and perspectives (Braun & Clarke, 2013). An interview guide (Appendix E) was developed in collaboration with the supervision team through reviewing existing literature and considering the possible role of relationships in engagement with the CEE. Additional prompts were added to the interview guide following the initial five interviews based on feedback from the progression viva. This included prompts around who participants would never talk to about the CEE, what it was like for participants during certain social events or festivals, and if there were any social occasions when discussions about climate are off-limits.

Sociograms. Due to the focus on relational experiences, it was felt that an additional research instrument could be valuable. There is evidence that visual tools can be usefully integrated in qualitative research (D'Angelo et al., 2016). These visual tools can take different formats depending on the specific needs of the research and the social representations that need to be conveyed. Visual tools can help to facilitate interaction with participants. The use of visualisation tools within qualitative research can help mitigate the abstract nature of some topics and can enhance participants' reflection process, which can contribute to the collection of rich data (Ryan et al., 2014). In addition to this, a visualisation of participants' social relationships incorporated into interviews can help both interviewer and interviewee keep track of relationships discussed during the qualitative interview (Altissimo, 2016). Therefore, a sociogram was included as part of the interviews as an elicitation tool but the sociograms themselves were not analysed.

A sociogram is a diagram illustrating social connections (Tubaro et al., 2016). It can be challenging to explore dynamism of relationships using sociograms; however, this limitation can be overcome through combining sociograms with interview narratives (Ryan et al., 2014). Using sociograms in interviews can aid in gathering information about the structures, meanings, and dynamics of relational experiences (Tubaro et al., 2016). Although sociograms are a snapshot of current relationships, they can also act as a prompt for exploring how some relationships might have changed (Tubaro et al., 2016) and as a prompt for memories of contacts (Ryan et al., 2014).

Sociograms developed from Moreno's (1934) work on using images to illustrate social linkage patterns (Freeman, 2000). Moreno's (1934) work on socionomy used charts and symbols to map the structure and evolution of groups. There are various types of sociograms, such as structured or unstructured, paper or computer-based, and ego-centred or context-centred (D'Angelo et al., 2016). A commonly used sociogram format in research is one which consists of concentric circles with the participant placed at the centre (e.g., Altissimo, 2016; Ryan et al., 2014; Tubaro et al., 2016). This is also referred to as a target sociogram (Northway, 1940). Target sociograms vary in the number of concentric circles or whether segments included refer to particular social contexts such as family, friends, or work (Altissimo, 2016). This form of sociogram was considered as a research instrument; however, it was felt that this could be overly prescriptive and might pre-determine the types of social relationships participants could illustrate. The use of visual tools in social network research often focuses on network centrality and network density (Von der Lippe, 2015). This was identified as an additional limitation of using this form of sociogram, as the research questions were concerned with the quality of relational experiences and their relevance to climate engagement.

Although sociograms can be analysed with corresponding data collected simultaneously during interviews (Altissimo, 2016), this research solely used the sociogram as an elicitation tool. A visual tool should balance subjectivity and standardisation to enable interviewees to depict their relational ties relatively freely while still offering them some guidance. Considering how to obtain this

balance, the researcher created an example sociogram to give participants a sense of what a sociogram might look like (Appendix F).

Illustrating relationships using target sociograms can imply a ranking of the importance of these relationships (Ryan et al., 2014). Ryan et al. (2014) suggest that visualising relationships in this way can enhance participants' sense of ethical responsibility to their friends and family. They found that some participants experience discomfort about where they place someone on their sociogram and where that person might expect to be placed. An additional potential ethical concern includes the possibility of participants forgetting to add someone to their sociogram, as this may be experienced as devaluing of their relationship. A more unstructured sociogram not based on concentric circles may offer participants a less hierarchical framework in which to illustrate their relationships, thus reducing some of these ethical concerns, while retaining the advantages of visual representation of relationships. In addition to this, reassuring participants that the sociograms are not published might help reduce any concerns related to how their sociogram might be perceived by others.

To overcome these identified limitations associated with target sociograms, the researcher considered the format of visual tools commonly used in therapeutic practice, particularly systemic therapy approaches (Von der Lippe, 2005). Genograms are generally used to map family relationships; however, other important non-familial relationships can also be included (McGoldrick, 2016). Combining genograms and sociograms into genosociograms has been advocated as a unifying tool for researching relationship contexts (Von der Lippe, 2015). The sociogram guidance and example provided to participants was based on symbols often used to illustrate relationships on genograms (McGoldrick, 2016). Although some guidance was given, as the sociograms served as an additional visual elicitation tool in this research rather than data that would be analysed, the researcher emphasised to participants that there was no right or wrong way to draw the sociogram. Allowing participants freedom to visually represent whatever relationships felt significant in a way that was personally meaningful to them felt more useful as a tool for further discussion about the nature and quality of personal relationships and how these may have shifted. For this reason, the research did not

aim to use or create a standardised sociogram format for analysis, despite some calls for this in the literature (Von der Lippe, 2015). The researcher called the visual tool a sociogram rather than a genosociogram or genogram as the visual tool was not based on a family tree structure and did not assume whether familial or non-familial relationships were likely to be more relevant.

Personal networks research focuses on reconstituting the social environment of an individual, while complete networks research focuses on mapping a set of relationships within a particular social context such as a school (D'Angelo et al., 2016). The critical realist and contextualist ontological and epistemological assumptions underpinning this research focused on exploring participant experiences in relation to the research questions. The research was not seeking to uncover 'facts' related to participants' social structures but was focused instead on exploring the experiential qualities of their relationships in relation to CEE engagement. This suits a counselling psychology lens, which views research knowledge as relational and dependent on subjectivity and context (Henton, 2016). Consequently, the use of sociograms in this study differed from the conventional use of sociograms in fields such as social network analysis, due to the emphasis on exploration and dialogue over a visual or structural representation of how social networks are constructed.

The Research Instrument

The research instrument consisted of three parts. The first part was a demographics questionnaire (Appendix G) recording basic demographic information to help contextualise the sample (Tracy, 2010). This included questions around age, gender, ethnicity, and an additional question related to the research topic about whether participants identified as activists (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The second part was the semi-structured interview schedule (Appendix E), which included the use of open questioning with prompts and probes where necessary (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The semi-structured interviews focused on exploring participants' relational experiences following emotional engagement with climate change. The third part was a sociogram (Appendix F) that participants were asked to create towards the beginning of the interviews (after the first two interview

questions). In this way, the sociograms functioned as an elicitation tool.

Method

Participants

Sampling Considerations, Inclusion, and Exclusion Criteria. Purposive sampling was used, as it was important that participants had experience of the issues being researched (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Participants were aged over 18, English-speaking, currently based in the UK, and self-identified as feeling emotionally affected by climate change. An ethical consideration was that people may have been involved in non-violent civil disobedience as part of their climate activism and may have ongoing court proceedings related to their involvement. A researcher's primary ethical duty is to protect participants from harm (Lowman & Palys, 2014); therefore, involvement in ongoing court proceedings was an exclusion criterion, to avoid research data being subpoenaed. To access participants who were emotionally engaging with climate change, recruitment was through routes such as various national activist organisations, environmental groups, and posters in community spaces throughout Bristol.

As this was a medium sized project using interactive data collection methods, a maximum of 10 - 20 participants was the recommended sample size (Braun & Clarke, 2013). A total of twelve participants took part in the study. There are issues with the concept of saturation when applied to qualitative methodologies which are not positivist or post-positivist (Varpio et al., 2017). Therefore, information power was considered in relation to sample size instead of saturation. Information power is recommended as a concept to guide sample size for qualitative studies (Malterud et al., 2015). Information power posits that the more information a sample holds relevant to the study, the lower the number of participants needed (Malterud et al., 2015). According to Malterud et al. (2015), sufficient information power depends on:

a. Study aims
b. Sample specificity
c. Use of established theory

d. Quality of dialogue
e. Analysis strategy

Considering the sample in relation to the areas outlined by Malterud et al. (2015), the study aims were relatively broad. Therefore, it was felt that a slightly larger sample was needed than the minimum anticipated sample size. The sample specificity was more challenging to determine. Although purposive sampling was attempted with diversity in mind and the sample was diverse in many ways, there was a lack of ethnic diversity within the sample. Despite this, sample specificity was felt to be adequate overall; participants held characteristics that were specific for the study based on the inclusion criteria, and there was a diversity of experiences within the sample. It was also important to consider the project timeline and a need to close data collection in December 2021 to ensure the timely completion of the project. If the research had been funded, it may have been possible to continue purposive sampling until a more diverse sample had been recruited. This limitation will be considered further in the recruitment section below. The level of theoretical background of the study meant information power was likely to be sufficient with a smaller sample size. The quality of dialogue of the study was enhanced using sociograms as an elicitation tool, thus facilitating rich discussion of relational experiences. Therefore, fewer participants were needed for information power. The analysis strategy of thematic cross-case analysis meant that more participants were likely to be needed than in an in-depth analysis of a few participants.

Table 1 shows a summary of the demographic information for each participant in the sample. All participants described their ethnic background as White British, White or White European. Participants described their social class as working class, middle class, lower middle class, and upper middle class. The age of participants ranged from 26-67 years, with a mean age of 42.83 years. Nine participants identified as female, and three participants identified as male. Ten participants identified as heterosexual, one participant identified their sexuality as ‘other’, and one participant identified as bisexual. One participant considered themselves to be disabled. All participants apart from one described themselves as activists. All interviews took place during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many

participants commented that their relationships and social networks had been affected by COVID-19 and lockdowns; the implications of this will be considered further in the discussion chapter.

Table 1.

Participant Demographics Table

Age	26 – 67 years	(*M* = 42.83, *SD* = 14.24)
Gender	Female Male	9 (75%) 3 (25%)
Employment status	Part-time Full-time Self-employed Full-time volunteer	7 (58.33%) 3 (25%) 1 (8.33%) 1 (8.33%)
Sexuality	Heterosexual Bisexual Other	10 (83.33%) 1 (8.33%) 1 (8.33%)
Ethnicity	White/White British White European	11 (91.67%) 1 (8.33%)
Social class	Middle Lower Middle Upper Middle Working	9 (75%) 1 (8.33%) 1 (8.33%) 1 (8.33%)
Disabled	Yes No	1 (8.33%) 11 (91.67%)
Relationship status	Married/Civil Partnership Partnered Single	6 (50%) 5 (41.67%) 1 (8.33%)
Has children	Yes No	6 (50%) 6 (50%)
Activist	Yes No	11 (91.67%) 1 (8.33%)

Procedure

Ethical Considerations

Ethical Approval. Ethical approval was granted by the University of the West of England Faculty of Health and Applied Sciences Research Ethics Committee (Reference number HAS.20.08.01; Appendix H). The British Psychological Society Code of Human Research Ethics (2021) was adhered to throughout the research. Due to the emotive nature of the research topic, it was possible that participants

could become distressed during the interviews. Additionally, there were important ethical issues to consider when using sociograms during interviews (Tubaro et al., 2016), including the potential emotional impact of mapping relationships. In addition to this, a completed sociogram can have potentially identifiable information about participants' relational ties (Tubaro, 2021).

To manage these ethical considerations, participants' distress was acknowledged, and an offer made to pause the interview if needed (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Participants were reminded that they could choose not to complete the sociogram or answer any questions without giving a reason. Information about available support services was provided to all participants in case they required support following the interview. Sociogram data were anonymised by covering any names with pseudonyms (Tubaro et al., 2016) before storing securely. As the purpose of the sociograms was to elicit richer data during the interviews, only transcribed data from the interviews were analysed. The sociograms themselves will not be published or disseminated in the thesis or any other materials. Care was taken to protect the confidentiality of participants by appropriately anonymising any information prior to data storage and analysis. A full risk assessment for the data collection process was also completed (Appendix D).

Consent Process. Informed consent was gained from participants by providing them with a participant information sheet, privacy notice, consent form and example sociogram with guidance for completion (see Appendices A through C, and Appendix F). The participant information sheet informed participants that their data would be anonymised (i.e., that any identifiable information would be removed) and analysed for the research project. It also stated that extracts from the interview may be quoted in the thesis and in any publications and presentations arising from the research. The participant information sheet explained that sociogram data would be used as part of the analytic process, but the sociograms themselves would not be published in the thesis or any other materials. It outlined how demographic data for all participants would be compiled into a table and included in the thesis and in any publications or presentations arising from the research as well.

Right to Withdraw. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study until the point of data analysis (up to one month following their interview).

Confidentiality. The information sheet explained how any information provided by participants would be treated confidentially, and personally identifiable details would be stored separately from the data. Care was taken to protect the confidentiality of participants by appropriately anonymising any information prior to data storage and analysis.

Sharing of the Research Findings. An additional ethical consideration is how and when the research results are shared with members of the social group researched and with the public (Tubaro, 2021). During the interviews, the researcher offered to contact participants with a summary of research findings. This was not for the purpose of member checking or member reflections (Tracy, 2010), but was a way to share the research and acknowledge the participants' contributions. All participants opted into this and expressed an interest in the results. So far, the researcher has emailed the five initial participants whose interviews contributed to a poster presentation (Souissi et al., 2021) in the British Psychological Society's Division of Counselling Psychology's 2021 conference. The researcher shared the poster with participants following the conference and updated them that the conference had a climate-focused stream. The researcher asked the participants to respond if they would like to opt out of any future communications relating to the research. The researcher received an encouraging response from this contact, and no participants opted out of further contact at this stage. During the interviews, one participant suggested that they felt the research should be shared with the generalist press as they felt it was important. Although researchers are increasingly encouraged to share research with the generalist press**,** there can be a risk of misrepresentation of results (Tubaro, 2021). The report of findings can be seen as a dynamic and cyclical process (Tubaro, 2021) and will be considered throughout the research project. Plans to share the research findings will be outlined further in the discussion chapter.

Recruitment

Recruitment information and forms were provided via Qualtrics. Potential participants were asked to contact the researcher via email if they had any questions, or to complete the consent and demographics forms (Appendices C and G) on Qualtrics if they were satisfied with the information provided and wanted to continue. After collecting participants' contact details (email address or telephone number) through Qualtrics, they were then contacted to arrange an interview once they had completed the forms. At the engagement stage, an email was sent to participants with blank copies of the participant information sheet, privacy notice and consent form to keep for their records.

A range of environmental activist groups and environmental interest groups such as Extinction Rebellion UK (including local groups, working groups or affinity groups), Rising Up, Reclaim the Power, Greenpeace UK, Friends of the Earth UK (including climate action groups), and The Wretched of the Earth were contacted via email or Facebook. This was to access diverse perspectives. Advertising through these local and national groups enabled people who were part of these groups to volunteer to take part if they would like to. Recruitment took place over a period of twelve months.

Recognising that all five initial participants had identified as White or White British, the researcher attempted to sample purposively by contacting more ethnically diverse environmental interest or activist groups. Over a period of six months, the researcher attempted to recruit through 25 different groups or sub-groups that were likely to have more diverse members. This included groups such as Extinction Rebellion Diaspora groups, 100 Black Men Walk, Black2Nature, Decolonising Environmentalism, and the Black Seeds Network. Three organisations responded saying they would share the recruitment paragraph with their members. Recruitment flyers were also posted up in five community spaces in areas of Bristol with larger communities of people from Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic groups (Bristol City Council, 2021). Recruitment materials were also adjusted to include information on the researcher's own mixed ethnic background as British-Tunisian, as this could encourage participants who may have felt more comfortable speaking to an insider researcher. Despite all these attempts, all participants in the sample

identified as White, White British, or White European. The implications of this are that the research may miss key groups and perspectives. This is a limitation of the study and will be considered further in the discussion chapter.

Interview Process

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all interviews were offered via telephone or videoconference. Offering interviews remotely helped to access a sample of participants nationally and helped to improve accessibility, as it can be challenging for some participants to attend a face-to-face interview due to time or geographical constraints (Johnson et al., 2019). Additionally, offering videoconference or telephone interviews removed the need to travel, which reduced ethical dilemmas related to the environmental impact of this research project (Hanna, 2012). Participants may feel more able to freely discuss sensitive subjects in a more anonymous mode of data collection like a telephone interview (Novick, 2008). Basic demographic information was recorded using a demographic form on Qualtrics.

Semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with participants. Interviews took place at an agreed time using the agreed format (videoconference or telephone). The length of the interviews ranged from 44 to 80 minutes (the mean duration was 62 minutes). One limitation was that it can be more challenging to complete a sociogram with participants when interviews are not face-to-face, particularly if the interview is over the telephone, due to the lack of a visual component. To address this, an example sociogram with guidance for completion was included as an addition to the participant information sheet. The researcher requested participants taking part in videoconference interviews to draw the sociogram during the interview as this could be shared over video with the researcher simultaneously (please see below for details). The researcher asked any participants taking part in telephone interviews to draw the sociogram in advance of the interview so that this could be emailed to the researcher prior to the interview.

A pilot interview was conducted with an acquaintance of the researcher to practice the interview and sociogram over telephone or videoconferencing. During videoconference interviews, participants were asked to complete a sociogram using

pen and paper, as low-technology options can be more suited to interviews (Hogan et al., 2007). Participants were then asked to hold their sociogram up to the screen so that a screenshot could be taken, enabling both participant and researcher to refer to the sociogram simultaneously. Eleven interviews took place over videoconferencing (Zoom or Microsoft Teams), and one interview took place over the telephone. All participants completed a sociogram; however, the participant who took part in a telephone interview had not completed the sociogram in advance of the interview, due to not realising this had been requested. Therefore, the participant completed a simple sociogram during their telephone interview and described it verbally to the researcher. Despite the researcher being unable to see the sociogram during the telephone interview, the sociogram nevertheless aided discussion during the interview and functioned effectively as an additional elicitation tool. One participant who took part in a videoconference interview mistakenly completed the sociogram in advance of the interview. The participant held this up so that a screenshot could be taken, and this also prompted exploration of relational experiences.

Data Protection

A data management plan was completed to ensure data were managed in line with the Data Protection Act (2018). General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR; Information Commissioner's Office, 2018) compliant privacy notices were used throughout data collection. All data were stored securely in a restricted folder on the UWE OneDrive. Information about the data was held within the data itself. This recorded the date, name and purpose of the data, the creator, details of how the data were created and analysed, and an explanation of any codes or abbreviations used. Audio recordings of interviews were anonymised during the transcription process, and audio recordings were deleted once transcribed. All transcription was completed by December 29, 2021. Once each interview had ended, sociograms were anonymised immediately and electronic copies were stored securely on UWE OneDrive. Any audio or written physical data were stored in anonymised electronic form as soon as possible after collection. Anonymised electronic copies of sociograms will be deleted once the doctoral research process and the

dissemination of results is complete. Access to anonymised data stored in a restricted folder on UWE OneDrive was granted to the researcher's supervision team only as and when needed to assist in the analytic process. All electronic data will be securely destroyed once the doctoral research process and the dissemination of results is complete.

Data Analysis Method

Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed according to Braun and Clarke's (2013) notation system for orthographic transcription (adapted from Jefferson, 2004; Appendix I). There are different approaches to TA (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Braun and Clarke (2019) refer to their approach as 'reflexive' TA. This highlights how essential it is that the researcher reflects on their ontological and epistemological assumptions (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Reflexive TA is intended to be carried out within a truly qualitative paradigm (Clarke & Braun, 2018). The researcher makes deliberate choices in their approach to data analysis (Terry et al., 2017) and researcher reflexivity is seen as a strength rather than bias (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

A six-phase experiential reflexive TA was conducted to identify themes across the dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Themes represent important qualities about the data relating to the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and bring meaning to experiences (DeSantis & Ugarriza, 2000). The researcher actively generates themes in the analysis, rather than viewing themes as passively 'emerging' from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013, 2021; Clarke & Braun, 2018).

Considering whether a more critical or experiential approach is taken to the analysis can help to guide the analytic choices made (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Experiential approaches often take more inductive and semantic approaches to analysis, while critical research tends to involve more deductive and latent approaches to the data (Terry et al., 2017). Analytic sensibility is a key aspect of this process, as it involves interpreting data through the researcher's chosen theoretical lens and going beyond surface-level content to explore meanings that link to wider issues (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The researcher had some initial coding meetings with the supervisory team to help develop this analytic sensibility. This was not to

ensure coding reliability, but to consider deeper-level interpretations of the data. Despite a more experiential focus, latent themes were also developed where appropriate, as the researcher's critical realist and contextualist approach to the data allowed for the consideration of social and psychological processes that might be out of participants' awareness.

The six phases in reflexive TA include dataset familiarisation, data coding, initial theme generation, theme development and review, theme refining, defining and naming, and writing up (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2021). Researcher reflexivity was woven through all phases (Trainor & Bundon, 2020), with the researcher reflecting in her journal on responses to the participants and the data. Firstly, during the data familiarisation phase, the researcher immersed herself in the data through repeated active reading of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This initially included the transcription of audio recordings of the interviews, before moving on to repeated readings of the transcripts.

The researcher generated initial codes from the dataset in the second phase (Braun & Clarke, 2006) by handwriting code labels on printed transcripts (Appendix J). The researcher reviewed sociograms, her reflexive journal and familiarisation notes before and during coding. There were two rounds of coding. The first coding round was in the chronological order of the interviews. Following the first round of coding, the researcher used an Excel spreadsheet to compile codes and associated data extracts within each transcript, before compiling codes and their recurrence across the whole dataset (Appendix K). There were 627 codes after the initial round of coding. The researcher then reviewed codes in relation to the research questions, collapsing overlapping codes into each other. Changes to codes were documented in the Excel spreadsheet. There were 277 codes after this process. Codes were then copied into a Word document, with non-recurring codes highlighted. A second coding round was completed using the printed transcripts, moving from transcripts six to one then 12 to seven. Coding moved from semantic to more latent coding in the second coding round (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Codes from the second coding round were added to the Excel spreadsheet, before reviewing and refining overlapping codes. Codes were reduced from 281 to 213 during this process.

Thirdly, the researcher analysed codes and considered how they combined to form themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This process involved identifying similarities and overlaps between codes (Braun & Clarke, 2013), and generating candidate themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher cut out codes on pieces of paper and moved these around during the process of theme generation (Appendix L). This phase involved creating thematic maps to consider the relationships between provisional themes and subthemes (Braun & Clarke, 2021) (Appendix M).

These candidate themes were developed and reviewed in the fourth phase (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Identifying central organising concepts (Braun & Clarke, 2013) for the themes helped the researcher to consider which codes may or may not fit with a particular theme (Terry et al., 2017). This phase of reviewing and refining themes included discarding candidate themes which were not sufficiently related to the research questions (Terry et al., 2017). Tentative themes were reviewed against all the associated coded data extracts (Braun & Clarke, 2021). These processes of review and refinement facilitated depth and rigour of analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2017). The supervision team was consulted throughout all phases of the analytic process, to check they were being executed skilfully and competently.

During the fifth phase of the analysis, the researcher refined, defined, and named themes (Braun & Clarke, 2021). This is where essential interpretative work was carried out (Clarke & Braun, 2014). Themes should not simply summarise content but should interpret key aspects of the data (Clarke & Braun, 2017). Theme definitions were written to consider central organisation, flow, quality, and clarity of themes (Braun & Clarke, 2021). This moved into the final phase of the analysis which was producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Considerations to ensure a quality analysis will be outlined further below.

Quality in Qualitative Research

Formal criteria for evaluating quantitative research are not appropriate for evaluating qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The diversity of qualitative methodologies means it can be challenging to agree on universal quality criteria for qualitative research (Yardley, 2000). For this reason, overarching qualitative

research quality criteria will be considered in conjunction with quality criteria specific to TA.

Firstly, there are overlaps in Yardley's (2000) and Tracy's (2010) quality criteria. These overlaps will be considered in relation to the research:

- Worthy topic and significant contribution (Tracy, 2010), or impact and importance (Yardley, 2000). The researcher considered the importance of the topic of engagement with the CEE, which was set out in the first chapter of this thesis, and the role of relationships within this. The Division of Counselling Psychology 2021 conference dedicated a stream to the CEE, also demonstrating the significance and timeliness of this topic to the counselling psychology profession and more widely.
- Rich rigour (Tracy, 2010), or commitment and rigour (Yardley, 2000). The researcher considered issues of rigour at all stages of the research. This included a thoroughness in data collection, transcription, and analysis. There were meetings with the supervisory team throughout analysis including during coding and theme development, and multiple coding rounds in a different order through the transcripts to ensure an evenly coded dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The researcher committed to engaging with the topic at depth through attending climate-related events and reflecting on this throughout.
- Sincerity and meaningful coherence (Tracy, 2010), or transparency and coherence (Yardley, 2000). Self-reflexivity (see below) is an important quality factor in qualitative research which assists transparency (Tracy, 2010; Yardley, 2000) and enhances ethical and methodological rigour (Smith, 1999). To ensure transparency and coherence, the researcher documented decisions and changes made during coding using an Excel spreadsheet (Byrne, 2022). The researcher photographed the different stages of theme generation, and documented changes to themes and associated codes in different versions of Word documents.

- Ethical considerations (Tracy, 2010) encompassed by sensitivity to context (Yardley, 2000). Demographic data helped to contextualise the sample. Ethical considerations of the study included sensitivity to context through an awareness of the possibility of ongoing court cases related to climate activism. Inclusion and exclusion criteria were decided with this in mind. The additional ethical considerations of the use of visual tools in research were also considered in depth.

Credibility can be evaluated by considering elements such as thick description, triangulation or crystallisation, and multivocality (Tracy, 2010). Resonance relates to how the research affects a variety of audiences through evocative representation and transferable findings (Tracy, 2010). These issues were considered during coding, theme generation and the writing of the report through using resonant quotes from various participants.

Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2020b) quality criteria for TA includes considering aspects of quality at all research stages. This includes considering the quality of transcription, thorough coding and theme generation, reviewing of themes against each other and the dataset, internal coherence of themes, a convincing and well-organised story told through the analysis, adequate time allocated to all phases of the analysis, and considerations of how the written report is produced. Details of steps taken to ensure quality of TA analysis are found in the section above. It is also key that the researcher is positioned as active in the research, rather than suggesting that themes passively 'emerge' from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Reflexivity is crucial in this and will be considered further in the section below.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity underpins Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach to TA and informs the researcher's theoretical framework, coding process and analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019). This consistently thoughtful and reflective engagement with the data enables a depth of analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019). As this research topic is of personal relevance to the researcher, a reflexive journal was used to reflect on her experiences throughout the research process. This included regular journal entries,

particularly after interviews, to consider responses to participants and initial reflections. The aim of this section is to make explicit the role of the researcher's positioning, values, interests and experiences in the production and analysis of the data.

The researcher's interest in the research topic was based on her feelings and concern about the CEE over many years. The researcher started to become more aware of the emotional and psychological impacts of this, and during her training realised the relevance of the topic to counselling psychology values of recognising social context and discrimination (Division of Counselling Psychology, 2020). The researcher noticed that her emotional engagement with the research topic shifted repeatedly over the course of the research, including overwhelming feelings of grief and worry at the stage of developing the research proposal. Illustrating this, the researcher's first journal entry is about a series of apocalyptic dreams. One of these dreams included the researcher running to tell people that there was a flood coming, and the reluctance of someone else in the dream to tell others about this as they were focused on trying to escape to higher ground. The researcher reflected on the potential significance of this dream and viewing herself as 'a messenger'. Over the course of the research, the researcher felt aware of feelings of urgency related to completing the research and communicating its findings. At times, this included questioning whether completing the research was the best use of the researcher's time in the face of an urgent climate and ecological crisis, or whether time would be better spent on activist initiatives.

As the researcher was engaging at depth with literature related to climate change, she noticed that she sometimes felt alienated from others who did not seem to share her concerns about the CEE. The researcher also noticed enhanced feelings of connection with others who were similarly engaging with the CEE, including during an online international regenerative event. The researcher also involved her husband in attending some climate-related events, which felt like a supportive experience. This combination of the researcher's emotional engagement, relational experiences and reading of existing literature shaped the focus of the research questions. The researcher is aware that these assumptions of

relational changes or difficulties during a journey of climate engagement informed the research.

The researcher's emotions seemed to recede at different stages over the research process, only to bubble up to the surface during more experiential climate crisis related meetings, workshops, and webinars that she attended during the research. Attending these events helped the researcher to further consider the relevance of the research to climate change engagement. Other global issues can make climate change concerns less of a priority for people (Pidgeon, 2012). This was interesting to consider in relation to the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic and the first UK lockdown. At this time, the researcher felt that her focus was on the pandemic, and she struggled to feel as engaged with the research topic. The researcher related this to a defence mechanism to try to prevent feelings of overwhelm and an attempt to keep functioning. This engagement shifted again for the researcher, as living through the pandemic felt like a longer-term global issue than she had initially anticipated. This resurrected feelings for the researcher about the urgency of the CEE as a global issue, and that this is an enduring concern.

Reflecting on the researcher's social positioning in relation to the research, the researcher's identity as a cisgendered dual heritage woman in her early thirties informed her perspectives. The researcher holds multiple cultural identities, having grown up in countries differing from her nationalities before moving to the UK as an adult. This involved growing up predominantly in the Middle East, in a country whose wealth is overwhelmingly based on the fossil fuel industry. The researcher is aware of her own conflicting feelings about this upbringing, which include an awareness of feelings of guilt for having benefited from the opportunities afforded her while living there. As a holder of dual Tunisian and British nationalities, the researcher felt concerned about news emerging over the course of the research about the threat posed by the Nationality and Borders Bill (UK Parliament, 2021) which could deprive a person of British citizenship. The researcher reflected on this in relation to how this could be used to deter people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities from taking part in non-violent protest. The researcher felt very aware of the lack of ethnic diversity in her sample and will consider the implications of this further during the discussion chapter. At the same time, the researcher

acknowledges positions of privilege in relation to her level of education and identifying as middle-class.

Considering further the political dimension of the research, the researcher felt aware of increased restrictions placed on people's ability to protest and a rise in authoritarianism. Awareness of these events could have influenced the researcher's decision not to recruit participants involved in ongoing court proceedings related to their climate activism to avoid research data being subpoenaed. This was primarily motivated by wanting to protect participants from further unanticipated repercussions of their climate activism and to minimise risks associated with the research, but excluding people with ongoing court proceedings means certain perspectives could be missing from this research. However, it is possible that if protest rights felt less under attack and non-violent direct actions did not result in the same degree of social and legal repercussions, the researcher may not have felt a need to protect participants from possible harm from the state. These events could also have affected participant uptake or participants' willingness to trust the researcher.

The researcher noticed her insider position shifting over the course of the research. The researcher felt she occupied a mostly insider position in relation to tending to align with participants' liberal political leanings. The researcher also identified as an insider researcher in relation to concern about the CEE and taking personal actions around this. The researcher reflected on personally engaging in some activism. At times the researcher felt like a fraud when comparing herself to participants who engaged in non-violent acts of civil disobedience carrying potential risk of arrest or older participants who had engaged in social justice activism for decades. The researcher noticed herself at times signalling to participants during the interviews that she had some knowledge of issues they were talking about in relation to activist groups or movements. The researcher saw this as positioning herself as an insider and building trust with participants. However, it is possible that this risked assuming a shared meaning or understanding of the topics being discussed.

It is important to reflect on how the use of sociograms in qualitative interviewing might affect the ways data are constructed and shared (Ryan et al.,

2014). There were a range of participant responses to the sociogram which may have affected the relationship between the researcher and the participants. A few participants commented on there being fewer people on their sociogram than they might wish or expect, and expressed some feelings of sadness about this. Participants also seemed aware of initially forgetting to add a significant person to their sociogram. The researcher felt aware of potential distress associated with creating sociograms, and supported participants as needed through empathic responses or reassurance. Participants also commented that it had been an interesting process, and the researcher generally experienced a sense of deepening rapport with participants as they spoke about their sociograms. This could relate to the researcher's use of sociograms in clinical practice, and an association with building a therapeutic relationship. The implications of constructing sociograms during the COVID-19 pandemic will be considered further in the discussion.

The researcher noticed experiences of self-doubt and anxiety throughout the process of the research. The researcher relates this to feeling like a novice qualitative researcher. Participants offered encouraging feedback to the researcher about how important and relevant the topic felt to them, and some expressed that this is something they have wondered about themselves within activist groups. Towards the end of interviews, it was not uncommon for participants to ask the researcher about her motivations to research this topic and her own engagement in climate activism. When asked, the researcher was honest with participants about her own concern about the CEE motivating the research and wanting to be more involved in climate activism. Throughout analysis and writing up, the researcher was aware of how participants' experiences were similar or different from her own. The researcher ensured equal attention to the different experiences of participants, including contradictory accounts.

This chapter has outlined the research design and methodology used in this study, considering issues of quality in qualitative research with a particular focus on researcher reflexivity. The creative method of combining visual elicitation tools with semi-structured individual interviews was discussed in depth. The analysis of the data gathered as described above will be explored in the following chapter.

Results

This chapter will give an initial overview of the themes and subthemes generated from the data, outlined in Table 2 below (see Appendix M for a visual mapping of themes). Subsequently, salient quotations from interviews and a brief interpretation of this in relation to the research questions will be presented in the following sections. A more detailed discussion of the analysis in relation to the existing literature will be presented in the discussion chapter following this.

Table 2.

Overview of Themes and Subthemes Generated From Analysis

Themes	Subthemes
1. Sustainable activism: The 'good enough' climate activist	1.1. It's hard trying to be a good enough activist 1.2. A secure base: Friends and family 1.3 Finding support through activism is important
2. Walking the tightrope: Interpersonal emotional management	2.1. *"People don't want to talk about it don't want to know about it"* – facing others' denial 2.2 Breaking point: The emotional strain of the climate crisis 2.3. *"They're <u>not</u> tied to the train tracks with me"* – support is not enough
3. It's a relief not having to hide	3.1. Feeling the need to hide 3.2. Feeling able to be yourself
4. Planting seeds for change through relationships	

Theme 1: Sustainable Activism: The 'Good Enough' Climate Activist

The first theme, with its three subthemes, related to challenges in sustaining CEE actions and the role of supportive relationships within this. This theme adapted Winnicott's (1958) concept of the 'good enough' caregiver and positioned climate activists as working towards being 'good enough' carers for the planet. This considered how CEE action is sustained, and challenges in doing this.

1.1. It's Hard Trying to Be a Good Enough Activist

The first subtheme related to the strain of navigating competing social norms within activist groups and wider society, and a sense of internalised pressure to embody an idealised activist identity. It can be challenging to sustain activism; the scale of change needed can feel out of reach. Engagement with the CEE can mean experiencing feelings of guilt about taking breaks from CEE actions.

Participants experienced competing social norms or unspoken expectations within different social groups. For example, in the quote below Dave expressed being perceived differently by his friends or by people within the CEE activist group:

> *"It's interesting amongst my friends I'm considered a hippy ((laughs)) because like ((laughs)) 'cos I'm not quite as bad as them and amongst [CEE activist group] people ((laughs)) I'm just the most like strait-laced boring person I'm stuck in between"* – [Dave]

Holding different social memberships and moving between groups evoked feelings of rejection or judgement by both circles. The possible distress of this is potentially indicated by and defended against by Dave's laughter, suggesting a sense of abandonment or not belonging.

Some participants also expressed difficulties associated with trying to meet standards of activism or care for the planet. Some participants expressed feelings of guilt when they felt they were struggling to meet these standards. In the extract below, Claire reflected on her experience of negative consequences at work following her CEE action:

> *"I can sort of see their point which makes me feel really guilty because I think that if I was a proper warrior for the climate I wouldn't really care but erm but yeah I mean because I say I care about climate change I'm just still doing this completely unremarkable corporate job so I'm a hypocrite really"* – [Claire]

Here, Claire shared feelings of guilt about being able to see the perspective of her employer in this matter. Claire contrasted this with her concept of a *"proper warrior"* for the climate who she believed would not care about this, indicating that here she clearly does not feel like a 'good enough' activist. This suggests a double bind, that activists can feel unable to win relationally either way. Mirroring this, Brigid spoke of a feeling of pressure towards self-sacrifice within activist circles, although this pressure was not *"overt"* but *"it's there in the background"*:

> *"A lot of the rhetoric within [CEE activist group] and within (.) activist circles is that y'know kind of 'if you really believe in this then you'd sacrifice everything for it'"* – [Brigid]

This brings a relational lens to how a 'good enough' activist identity is constructed and who defines 'good enough'. However, CEE activism can be challenging to sustain in the face of the scale of change needed and resistance from others, as seen in the quote below from April:

> *"I guess I kind of gave up in a way I kind of gave up and thought I just 'okay If you can't y'know can't beat 'em join 'em' kind of thing ((laughs))"* – [April]

Her words and, possibly, her laughter here convey a feeling of futility. Other participants expressed a waning in their CEE activism at different points in time. For example, some participants reported being left with difficult feelings after key climate events or CEE actions, as seen in the quote below from Ian:

> *"Especially after the G7 and y'know it's I mean it's a great process there's nothing wrong with it's just in terms of y'know nothing nothing changed […] ((sighs)) yeah"* – [Ian]

Ian's sigh could indicate a sense of disappointment and sadness in relation to this. Participants expressed feelings of deflation when hoped for changes were not evident following these occasions. However, engagement with the CEE can also mean experiencing feelings of guilt about taking breaks from CEE actions, as illustrated in Juliet's quote below:

> *"They can't really withdraw from it because it's like (.) something's gonna collapse if they do ((laughs)) even more even if well it shouldn't we should be able to like step back if we need to have erm time for a break and most of us do but still you you still have still find yourself feeling a bit guilty of doing that"* – [Juliet]

This quote evokes a sense of the weight on climate activists to continue with CEE actions and feeling like there is a risk of their efforts failing if they take a break to focus on self-care. Juliet's incongruous laughter might suggest the fear associated with this risk of *"collapse"*.

Pressures on some participants to try to fulfil an idealised activist identity, and at times struggling to take breaks from CEE activism when needed can mean that activism can be hard to sustain.

1.2. A Secure Base: Friends and Family

The second subtheme related to the importance of trusting that close existing personal relationships would be supportive regardless of the wider negative repercussions of CEE actions. This subtheme adapted the concept of a secure base in attachment theory. The secure base supported participants in facing the challenges of CEE engagement. Friends and family who are less engaged with the CEE can help moderate pressures around self-sacrifice.

Dave expressed that it was *"extremely reassuring"* to have a secure relationship with his brother, and that CEE engagement was something they shared:

> *"I <u>knew</u> I had security in my relationship with my brother that he's been <u>absolutely</u> like <u>there</u> for everything"* – [Dave]

The emphasis that Dave places on the security of the relationship with his brother indicates how profound this is for him. Similarly, Hannah spoke of her shared CEE engagement with her sister:

> *"My sister we've always been like best friends and close so I guess it's just one of like another thing that we can do together and we can chat about and going to protests together"* – [Hannah]

Hannah's relationship with her sister offers an important sense of solidarity and shared experience. Juliet also expressed how important it was for her to feel she had someone close to her who shared and understood her CEE engagement to be able to support her:

> *"Um ((while sighing)) well definitely I couldn't be with (.) well I wouldn't have married [my husband] if he wasn't on the same level of understanding as I was or at least getting it erm (.) yeah I needed someone in my life that would understand what I was going through"* – [Juliet]

This demonstrates that, for Juliet, CEE engagement was a crucial pre-requisite for any life partner. Similarly, some participants spoke of knowing close others would be supportive of them regardless of the outcome of their CEE activism. For example, Brigid reflected on the sense of emotional support from loved ones and that this would help in facing the negative repercussions of activism:

> *"I feel very kind of emotionally supported with that that they erm (.) tha- that whatever the outcome of my activism they will still think that I'm a good person and yeah did the right thing and (.) will probably congratulate me even if society as a whole punishes me through y'know through like erm arrest and the legal system"* – [Brigid]

Brigid contrasted the social support and acceptance from her loved ones with anticipated societal punishment or disapproval of CEE activism. Considering social support in relation to individual CEE actions, Klara spoke of the importance of supportive personal relationships when making individual changes. Klara reflected

that it would be more challenging to make changes if she and her husband *"were at opposite ends of the spectrum on on issues like that then yes it would make a really big difference"*:

> *"It's much much harder to make those personal changes I think if you're because it is personal if you're feeling (.) very alone or very isolated with that or also very erm (.) if you feel it's really hard to find out what's the best thing to do or inform yourself"* – [Klara]

Klara emphasised that without the support of close others, one could feel isolated when acting on the CEE. However, some participants also noted how loved ones who are not as engaged with the CEE can help in balancing pressures around self-sacrifice. In the quote below, Brigid reflected on the discussions she has had with her boyfriend around this:

> *"He's kind of sat there going 'well actually if you give everything away then y'know what do you have that's a bit self-defeatist y'know what do you have to then do something with like it's better to keep a bit of stuff for you so that you still have the resources to continue to help people' which the more we've talked about it the more that I've kind of acquiesced to his point and and acquiesced with the logic of that so I don't feel as guilty about that as I used to and I don't feel that as much of a need to give everything"* – [Brigid]

Brigid expressed how discussions with her boyfriend have helped with feelings of guilt and have helped her continue to engage in CEE activism in a way which feels personally sustainable. Similarly, Ian reflected on the support of his wife as a helpful reminder of finding enjoyment in life while continuing to engage in CEE action:

> *"I feel y'know the time has passed we need to be everybody should be protesting but [my wife] feels more y'know it's (.) 'it's our lives we need to enjoy it as well' […] and in a way that's a very good corrective sort of y'know we erm sort of she supports me and that's y'know fantastic"* – [Ian]

Describing his wife's perspective as a *"corrective"* suggests a remedying or balancing effect, which Ian experiences as supportive.

1.3 Finding Support Through Activism is Important

Participants expressed varying levels of support from existing relationships related to their CEE actions. Finding support elsewhere through CEE groups, in person or online, was key in maintaining action. Bonds formed through the adversity of CEE activism were close and long-lasting. Taking part in collective action gave a sense of solidarity and hope.

In the quote below, Claire related a lack of support of her CEE activism contributing to feelings of exhaustion:

> *"Sometimes I think if I was more sort of supported like if there were people around who I felt I could really talk to about climate change honestly I'd be able to do more or at least I wouldn't feel so burnt out and exhausted all the time*" – [Claire]

This highlights the importance of finding support and feeling able to speak to others openly about the CEE. Claire went on to express later that for her, the COVID-19 pandemic had negatively impacted the social support aspect of CEE activist groups saying *"since I joined [CEE activist group] that has been something of a social support system and before the pandemic we used to do social things together"* and how during the pandemic *"we just have like Zoom calls and it's not the same there's no sort of social talking or hanging out".*

Through activism and community groups, Hannah found it helpful to find people who shared her CEE engagement:

> *"I think until I met other people who were as interested and not even just [CEE activist group] like a couple of the other community groups that I'm part of erm like they were massively helpful as well just to see that there are other people out there who have been caring about this a lot longer than I've even been alive so that's nice but it's just frustrating when like especially like people like my grandma will just completely deny that it's even (.) a problem"* – [Hannah]

This sense of validation and understanding from CEE activist and community groups contrasted with the denial Hannah experienced from others in her life. Many participants expressed a powerful feeling of support and belonging from CEE and activist group memberships. For example, Faith and Ian likened this to the feeling of a spiritual community or home:

> *"It's funny actually it's almost like a it's quite similar to the feeling of a church actually in in almost in a way I feel closer to my [CEE group] friends because of the campaigning than to the actual church*" – [Faith]

> *"I felt I was coming home actually when I first joined [CEE activist group] and erm it was erm (.) erm ((pause)) it was really lovely"* – [Ian]

The words *"church"* and *"home"* imply that these groups are a place of refuge. Ian's pause in this quote could hint at the emotional intensity associated with this sense of belonging. Many participants spoke of building supportive relationships within CEE or activist groups. For example, Lily spoke of forming new friendships within CEE activist groups:

> *"I've got a whole new lot of friends as well that I didn't have before"* – [Lily]

This demonstrates the opportunities for forming close friendships through CEE involvement. Dave spoke of meeting his partner through a CEE activist group, saying *"my girlfriend I actually met through [CEE activist group]"* and of making new friends through his activism. Here he reflects on the process of forming these relationships:

> *"It's been an interesting thing of like almost seeing them like colleagues and then eventually being like 'do you want to hang out we could do that' ((laughs)) like making a new friend it's been quite a weird feeling to do this"* – [Dave]

This highlights the development of individual relationships within activist groups, shifting from a more task-focused relationship to an emotionally closer relationship. Dave's laughter and describing the process of forming friendships within the group

as a "*weird feeling"* might suggest a sense of surprise about this aspect of his activism. Many other participants spoke of forming friendships and supportive relationships through CEE groups, despite the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, as illustrated in the quote from Grace below:

> *"And made a lot more relationships by joining the groups a lot more friends and some really good erm (.) relationships with other people with kids that we we go and the long-term plan is for us to see to meet more often but since we started doing a lot of these things it's been the pandemic but yeah so we should have we have gained some really positive relationships out of being more aware of this sort of thing"* – [Grace]

Grace highlighted the positive experience of gaining new friendships as a family through her increased CEE engagement, despite the COVID-19 pandemic posing a barrier to meeting as often as would be desired. This forming of relationships within groups helps create increased opportunities for social support. Participants described these friendships as supporting their sustained CEE engagement. Many participants also spoke poignantly of how bonds formed through the adversity of activism were close and long-lasting. April talked about how this *"takes your friendships to entirely different levels"*:

> *"I had whole I had hundreds of people that I really felt that I could trust with my lives tha- with my life an- and me them and like y'know really really intense level of trust and companionship with people*" – [April]

April emphasised the strong bond of trust and connection formed through climate activism, and a sense of intimacy instantly created with hundreds of people during actions. Similarly, in the quote below Juliet spoke of this sense of real kinship, like that of a blood relative, experienced through taking part in a protest:

> *"At the end of the week when you say goodbye, you're like hugging so many people you're not even sure you know their names but you had some kind of connection during the week because you've been doing stuff together and it's just it's just really great actually (.) it's like yeah you've found well I've*

> *found my tribe […] clearly [CEE activist group] is like most of my life now it's also kind of <u>family</u>"* – [Juliet]

Both April and Juliet experienced the risks of CEE activism leading to a strong connection in relationships with other activists.

Participants expressed how taking part in collective action gave a sense of solidarity and hope. For example, Faith spoke of how this gave a sense of *"all pulling in the same direction"*:

> *"I think with the campaign network y'know you you're preparing statements together you're passing stuff to each other you- you're recommending webinars and erm y'know and you pass on requests for action and stuff like that and you get very <u>close</u> to them y'know you spend a lot of time together and you're all pulling in the same direction and I think that's really nice*" – [Faith]

Faith emphasised the closeness experienced with others through shared time and efforts. A sense of solidarity and hope was experienced through both sustained campaigning, as well as briefer actions such as climate marches.

Theme 2: Walking the Tightrope: Interpersonal Emotional Management

The second theme, with its three subthemes, related to a precarity associated with interpersonal emotional management while engaging with the CEE. This included participants facing the denial of others. Participants spoke of having to find ways of managing their emotions and those of others. Part of this interpersonal emotional management related to trying to manage tensions within personal relationships when CEE engagement was not shared. Interpersonal emotional management also related to a reduction in discussing emotions about the CEE after longer term engagement, and inhibitions in talking openly about emotions within activist groups.

2.1. "People Don't Want to Talk About it Don't Want to Know About it" – Facing Others' Denial

The first subtheme related to denial as a social process occurring between people. This included others responding in hostile or dismissive ways, or more explicitly policing topics of conversation by shutting down attempts at discussing the CEE. This related to being experienced as a threat to others' continued denial of the CEE. This also included emotion and conversation norms present across different social contexts related to avoidance of difficult emotions.

Participants spoke in depth about their experiences of navigating others' denial of the CEE. This occurred across varied social settings. Ed framed this as people feeling lost and not wanting to know about the CEE:

> *"People are floundering y'know and so it can make it difficult <u>that</u> makes it difficult and also people you don't want to be (.) y'know and I think this is raw this is <u>raw</u> and you want to shut it out people don't want to talk about it don't want to know about it"* – [Ed]

Ed use of the word *"floundering"* highlights the struggle associated with facing the reality of the CEE, evoking a lack of safety and an uncertainty about the future. He can empathise with the desire of others wanting to shut out the unbearable emotional intensity of the CEE at times: *"you want to shut it out"*. Ed's emphasis of the word *"raw"* evokes a sense of unprocessed anguish beyond words or awareness. This inability of others to face the painful reality of the CEE makes it difficult for participants to talk about. Some participants experienced this denial as a sense of collective madness or delusion, as seen in the quote below from Ian:

> *"We're living in these this <u>delusion</u> of the material world that we see in this bizarre way*" – [Ian]

This denial was experienced as having a surreal quality, a living nightmare, seen as allowing a materialistic focus and enabling injustice. There is a tension between participants' separation from this collective delusion as they engage with the CEE

and face others' denial, while also reluctantly belonging to the systems which maintain denial.

One of the mechanisms through which denial is maintained is through participants being faced with aggressive or dismissive responses when disrupting others' denial. For example, in the following extract April considers her mother's response to her attempts at discussing the CEE:

> *"My mum just keeps coming up with y'know the kind of like 'oh but the planet's been heating and cooling for thousands of years'"* – [April]

Through this, concerns about the CEE were dismissed by others. This has a silencing effect, which is like some participants' experiences of partners, friends, or family members more explicitly policing topics of conversation by shutting down attempts at discussing the CEE. For example, Hannah reported being prevented from talking about the CEE on any occasion with family:

> *"It's quite <u>healthy</u> conversations but I think my mum just doesn't want to hear it she just doesn't want it getting brought up so although us lot are all maybe happy to have a stimulating conversation my mum just is like 'no'"* – [Hannah]

Hannah experienced other family members as being more open to discussing the CEE despite having different views; however, her mother did not want this to be discussed in her presence. Hannah said that her boyfriend felt similarly to her mother, and that she believes they *"just don't want to think about or maybe not be in that space I guess they'd just rather talk about something else"*. This policing of conversation topics could be related to being experienced as a threat to others' continued denial of the CEE, and an attempt to cling to less threatening subjects. Discussing the CEE generates emotions that might be difficult to face, regarding a sense of personal responsibility for humankind's harm to the planet. This avoidance of painful emotions could pose an important obstacle to being open to changing one's engagement with the CEE.

Evasion of difficult emotions was evident in some participants' awareness of sociocultural norms of emotional experiencing and expression. For example, in the quotes below, Hannah and Ed expressed a sense of spoiling the mood by discussing the CEE with others:

> *"I do think that there probably is a vibe of like 'don't bring the don't bring the vibe down with speaking about stuff like that like let's just enjoy the night' kind of thing so I'd say I <u>would</u> speak about in most occasions but I don't think in most it would be well received*" – [Hannah]

> *"You can pretend it's alright and it <u>is</u> sort of alright but it's a spoiler you're a spoiler y'know if you bring up this 'what the end of the world yeah yeah yeah actually yeah it looks like probably is yeah' ((laughs)) best not bring it up"* – [Ed]

In the quotes above, Ed and Hannah detect a preference in others of avoiding more difficult emotions associated with the CEE. This could be a spoken or unspoken urging to shift to emotions that are seen as more 'positive' or socially acceptable. This emotional management may also have been present in the frequent use of laughter that recurs throughout the participant quotes, particularly when discussing highly distressing topics, as can be seen in Ed's quote above. This laughter could be seen as a defence against high levels of potentially unconscious distress or despair.

Similarly, Brigid expressed how loved ones try to impress their views about the CEE on her, and a sense of pressure to comply with positivity emotion norms experienced as *"toxic positivity"*:

> *"They're trying to kind of <u>convince</u> me (.) that actually the reality is closer to <u>their</u> view and not my view […] they're not doing it for malicious reasons but it can be difficult (.) to know how to <u>respond</u> to that because (.) it's almost like that erm I hate I hate the phrase but it's almost like that toxic positivity thing*" – [Brigid]

In the quote above, Brigid recognises that this is not done with malice but is more an attempt by loved ones to alleviate Brigid's distress or their own. However, this has a similarly silencing effect, as it maintains denial of the extent of the CEE and reduces expression of emotions that are not viewed as 'positive'.

Participants also expressed an awareness of conversation norms present across varied social contexts. Ian spoke of it not being easy to talk about the CEE as the conversation *"moves so quickly onto what the company decides"*:

> *"I mean most people don't want to talk about it actually I think that's the bottom line*" – [Ian]

Ian expressed a general sense of most people preferring not to talk about the CEE. This could be seen as others steering the conversation to less emotionally challenging subjects.

2.2. Breaking Point: The Emotional Strain of the Climate Crisis

The second subtheme related to how emotions about the CEE can be hard to bear. Channelling emotions into action was a way that many participants coped with distressing emotions about the CEE. Participants spoke of needing to disengage at times from the intensity of their feelings, and of navigating emotion norms within activist groups. Differences in CEE engagement can also generate difficult emotions towards loved ones or impair existing relationships, at times risking a loss of relationship. This was often managed through focusing on what the relationship is based on, whether this was the history of the relationship or other shared interests. Compartmentalising and trying to avoid contentious topics were other ways that participants tried to maintain valued relationships. Challenges associated with this included loved ones taking participants' engagement with the CEE as a judgement or personal attack, in the face of their inaction. There was a sense of contradiction related to trying not to judge loved ones for their lack of CEE engagement while managing feelings of frustration about this. Learning how to talk productively about the CEE formed part of this emotional and relational

management.

Lily spoke of not being able to fully engage in the degree of her emotions about the CEE as this would stop her from being able to function, and suggested that within CEE activist groups *"they <u>are</u> looking at it all the time but because it's <u>so</u> much there they have to they gotta keep it away"*:

> *"If I <u>really</u> erm (.) <u>felt</u> what I feel I wouldn't be able to do anything at all you'd think I was mad because I'd <u>have</u> to go mad, I'd have to go running screaming around the streets saying 'for <u>fuck's</u> sake <u>do</u> something'"* – [Lily]

Anger, fear, and frustration are palpable in Lily's quote above. There is a sense of Lily teetering on a precipice, protecting herself from going over the edge and succumbing to raving at the insanity of the world. This emotional management is also evident in the extract below where Ian illustrated how he persists in talking about the CEE although this can become depressing:

> *"We talk about it in [CEE activist group] I talk about it with my wife erm (.) with some friends occasionally but the trouble is it's erm (.) you just talk about it and you just get so depressed so quickly it's very difficult to talk about it and to erm (.) feel positive so I do there's other things I'm doing y'know we we just as lockdown started we erm managed to get an allotment which is great sort of a pressure valve feel you're doing growing something*" – [Ian]

Talking about the CEE with others can raise almost unbearable feelings. In this quote, Ian managed his emotions during the interview by moving on to talk about something that felt more hopeful. This was also how Ian managed his emotions about the CEE more broadly by focusing on actions with a sense of purpose and hope. The words *"pressure valve"* suggest a need to regularly relieve mounting distress. Growing plants offers a tangible sense of progress and change through one's efforts, which can be more challenging to experience through other actions. Participants often spoke of managing difficult emotions through focusing on actions they could take about the CEE.

Some participants reported noticing a reduction in discussing emotions about the CEE after longer term engagement. April spoke of a *"huge emotional reaction"* when first understanding the *"enormity"* of the CEE. However, over time emotions about the CEE seem to become a taken for granted topic which is less discussed:

> *"It's much more on your (.) like in your life but like it's not something that we ever talk about ((laughs)) me and [my friend] not cos it's I guess it's been going on for so long kind of thing it's just something that's taken for granted"* – [April]

April said of her motivations to take part in the interview, *"I am interested in connecting with my grief about it which is I think what drew me to talking to you"* and that she wanted to connect to this grief with other people. This suggests that difficult emotions about the CEE are still present but less salient in longer term engagement. This could relate to how some participants experienced activist groups as being action-focused or expressed feeling inhibited in talking openly about their emotions about the CEE within activist groups, for fear of slipping back into overwhelm. For example, Claire spoke about a sense of responsibility to maintain activist group morale:

> *"With [CEE activist group] with other climate change groups there is a sort of sense of 'even if we're feeling totally frightened and helpless you still have to have to say out loud that you think we can still win this and turn this around as a as a campaign group' so you sort of have to be optimistic even if you don't feel optimistic so it's not totally free to express your opinions because you're worried about dragging everyone else down"* – [Claire]

Although maintaining a sense of collective efficacy may play an important role in maintaining collective action, the pressure to maintain this can leave individuals feeling isolated with difficult emotions about the CEE within the group, where their expression is perceived to reduce the energies needed for success.

Participants spoke of varied ways in which they tried to manage tensions in their relationships related to differences in CEE engagement. In the extract below, Ed discussed how differences in CEE engagement with his brother has led to painful arguments:

> *"We've had some very heated arguments that have been left us terribly bruised and at the last one he y'know we both said 'we don't want that to happen again y'know we can rule out things'"* – [Ed]

Ed emphasised the damage resulting from these arguments, likening it to a physical injury, and spoke of trying to preserve the relationship by avoiding discussing political topics. Similarly, in the extract below, Faith reflects on maintaining her friendship with someone who sees the CEE as a conspiracy to make people *"obedient"*. Through focusing on shared interests and not discussing more polarised topics, tensions are avoided:

> *"I just don't argue with her erm I just I just have to (.) be a friend to her and ((laughs)) we try not to talk about contentious stuff and she's erm she's really keen on gardening so she's just got this amazing allotment and she's good at music so we end up talking about that instead"* – [Faith]

Faith spoke of compartmentalisation and how *"in social relationships you just have you have a little wall inside your mind"*. Compartmentalising, humour, and trying to avoid contentious topics were some of the ways that participants tried to maintain valued relationships with people who did not share their engagement with the CEE. This can be seen in the quote below from April:

> *"I just try and keep it sweet so y'know and just don't deal with stuff other than yeah make it easy"* – [April]

April's quote evokes an awareness of avoidance related to trying to *"keep it sweet"*. Maintaining important relationships was a key consideration for participants. Challenges associated with trying to preserve relationships despite differences in CEE engagement included loved ones feeling judged or taking participants' CEE engagement as a personal attack or criticism:

> *"The most annoying thing the thing I think that impacts most relationships is when people think that you're blaming them and it's not about like you or I it's about these people that are right at the top that are causing these problems and these big polluters but yeah I think that's difficult"* – [Hannah]

Hannah expressed how others feeling blamed positions individuals as adversaries rather than uniting against the CEE as a systemic issue. Framing the CEE as an individual rather than systemic issue upholds existing power structures, creating conflict within personal relationships and facilitating a lack of meaningful change. In the extract below, April expressed how relationships can be damaged by differences in CEE engagement:

> *"Some friendships were damaged erm (.) through erm through that y'know through by my politics basically not because I- I don't think I was I mean I think I think if I told it wasn't so much like I wasn't judging them or saying 'you shouldn't be doing this or shouldn't be doing that' but b- by saying 'oh this is what I'm doing with my life' they then felt attacked"* – [April]

April expressed how friends could respond defensively to her engagement with the CEE despite not trying to impose this on others, taking it as a criticism of them and their life choices. The hesitation in the quote above suggests that it may have been difficult for April to admit that her choices have cost her some relationships, perhaps indicating the depth of her loss. April spoke of how one of these friendships *"hasn't repaired"* following this despite her efforts to reach out. Dave also spoke of the risk of losing friendships if he were to judge their lack of CEE engagement:

> *"I don't want to lose friends over this but if I was to if I was to make if I was to judge my friends over what they do about the collapse of our climate and ecosystems I wouldn't have any friends left"* – [Dave]

This demonstrates the magnitude of the CEE for participants' relationships, as well as the magnitude of societal and lifestyle change required now. Grace expressed

how these differences in CEE engagement can feel highlighted at certain social occasions or festivals, such as Christmas:

> *"It's still a nice family event but I don't buy into the whole erm (.) sort of sparkly affair that everybody else does and that really bothers me that people do that"* – [Grace]

This suggests that Grace experiences feelings of disconnection or frustration with others who are less engaged with the CEE, as Christmas can be a time when consumerism can be elevated. Despite making choices aligned with her values regarding how Christmas is celebrated in her family, Grace spoke of how wider social practices around Christmas now make it more *"depressing"* or a *"negative experience"* for her.

Participants also spoke of their efforts in persisting in talking about the CEE while maintaining relationships. In the quote below, Dave reflected on the balancing act of trying to preserve relationships:

> *"I've had to try to find a way to (.) talk about it whilst staying their friend and whilst not making them feel bad for it but also not lying and not avoiding the truth of it which is a difficult skill"* – [Dave]

Dave's quote demonstrates the effort involved in developing the skills needed to maintain relationships despite the difficult emotions that can be raised by differences in CEE engagement, and the difficulty of bringing it into relationships without triggering guilt in others. Learning how to talk productively about the CEE formed part of participants' emotional and relational management. This included considering the 'window of tolerance' (Siegel, 1999) when speaking to others about the CEE so as not to overwhelm them, and encouraging dialogue through a compassionate approach:

> *"Now I know a bit better about how to be diplomatic ((laughs)) and talk about that subject without (.) uh making people too uncomfortable knowing where to stop and giving the right amount of information and not bragging*

too much about it actually" – [Juliet]

The quotes above demonstrate the evolution of participants' approaches to discussing the CEE with others who are less engaged. Adapting their approach can help in maintaining relationships and can mean that others are more receptive to discussing the CEE. Despite this, attempting to convince others of the reality of the CEE was exhausting and took an emotional toll on participants. This was described by Juliet as *"just too much energy"* and the reason why *"all the other friends I have left mostly are activists"*.

2.3: "They're <u>not</u> Tied to the Train Tracks With Me" – Support Is not Enough

The third subtheme related to feelings of isolation despite supportive personal relationships, due to participants feeling their experience is not understood. Participants expressed feeling more distant from certain loved ones due to their lack of connection to the CEE, and feelings of sadness or powerlessness about this. Those loved ones struggled with witnessing participants' emotional engagement with the CEE and had difficulty staying with their distress without trying to alleviate this through false reassurance. Although some people were experienced as supportive, attempts at reassuring or downplaying the CEE left participants feeling alone in the degree of their concern about the CEE.

Many participants expressed feelings of isolation when engaging with the CEE. For example, in the quote below Brigid expressed how this feels like loved ones are not alongside her:

"So even like my mum and my boyfriend (.) they're <u>there</u> they're comforting me but they're <u>not</u> on the train tracks with me they don't they still don't so it's not that they don't see the climate crisis as a real thing but they don't think it's as <u>bad</u> as I think it's gonna be" – [Brigid]

Despite feeling well-supported by her boyfriend and her mum, Brigid expressed feeling alone with the horror of the CEE, which she likens to being tied to the tracks of an approaching train (a metaphor that will be further explored later in this

subtheme). This sense of isolation when engaging with the CEE was also reflected in the quote below from Hannah:

> *"When it first happened, I'd just sort of not speak to as many people about it so I think I then felt quite isolated quite alone I remember during COVID last year I actually like went through like a two month phase of just being like right stuck in the middle of like ecoanxiety just quite low mood as well and just feeling like I had absolutely nobody to talk to about it"* – [Hannah]

Feeling isolated when emotionally engaging with the CEE is particularly striking when considering the CEE as a global and collective problem which many are concerned about, in Britain and around the world. This could relate to feeling others do not share the degree of emotional connection or action in relation to the CEE. Similarly, some participants expressed an increased feeling of distance within personal relationships with those who were not as engaged in the CEE:

> *"I feel (.) more slightly more distant from people who aren't really engaged with this (.) erm in some way"* – [Ian]

In the quote above, Ian reflects on this feeling of distance or separation from others. This evoked a feeling of loss and longing for connection, with differences in CEE engagement experienced as a barrier to this. Some participants expressed feelings of sadness, powerlessness, and frustration about loved ones' lack of CEE engagement. For example, Claire and Juliet spoke of how they wanted their close relationships to understand and share their CEE engagement:

> *"It's just yeah just <u>annoying</u> and depressing I feel if I can't even convince the people I'm supposedly close to I can't convince anyone*" – [Claire]

> *"You want the people you <u>love</u> to get what you're doing*" – [Juliet]

This conjures up feelings of hopelessness and a lack of personal power or efficacy. Many participants expressed how their loved ones struggled with their distress about the CEE. Ed expressed how *"if you let it really sit with you emotionally"* it affects the people around you:

> *"I talk to my partner erm who ((coughs)) I think found it finds it difficult really y'know not criticising her for that but I think I talk to her erm and I think she finds it difficult to do to y'know live with it and manage it*" – [Ed]

In this quote, Ed tries to empathise with how his engagement with the CEE is challenging for his partner. Many participants spoke of their experience of this being difficult for partners in particular. Ian also expressed how this has affected the relationship with his wife:

> *"It's been difficult I mean [my wife] and I erm (.) I mean she's sort of slightly unhappy with me being so y'know preoccupied with it in the sense that y'know it just doesn't change anything that you've done erm I mean 'let's get on with enjoying ourselves' and erm ((pause)) is I find that difficult because well it affects our relationship (.) erm and (.) but I think we've reached a erm a position of acceptance on both sides we accept where we are"* – [Ian]

Ian reflected on working towards accepting each other's position; however, concern about the CEE is positioned as a barrier to enjoying life and as a source of unhappiness. This is echoed in the extract below, where Brigid spoke about how her boyfriend can be upset seeing her worried about the CEE:

> *"He gets upset that I can't get rid of this worry that the apocalypse is coming*" – [Brigid]

Brigid experienced her close relationships as supportive and caring towards her; however, her mother and her boyfriend found it difficult to sit with her distress without trying to reassure. Brigid contrasted this with experiencing her best friend as alongside her because *"she doesn't try and make it better or reason it out or logic it out"*. This experience of trying to speak about the CEE and having concerns minimised was also shared by Hannah:

> *"Even the people I would speak to about it would minimise it erm and I guess it was a rubbish cycle really 'cos I was sat reading these books all about like doomsday ((laughs)) and stuff like that"* – [Hannah]

Hannah's laughter when discussing the end of the world feels like a defence against high levels of distress, as though the minimising that Hannah experienced from others is echoed in a curtailing of her own emotional experiencing. This inappropriate laughter is also present in the quote below from Ian:

> *"I went on my own the other day and cycled over to see her and spent an hour just talking about how crap the world is ((laughs)) […] which is actually quite cathartic*" – [Ian]

In the quote above, Ian described how talking openly about the CEE with a friend was a form of catharsis, demonstrating how turning towards distress can help to process it. A few participants expressed how fatalism can be experienced as more supportive than denial or reassurance. This could be linked to not feeling pressured to maintain what feels like a false sense of hopefulness or denial of the extent of the CEE.

Despite supportive personal relationships, many participants reported feeling alone in the degree of their concern about the CEE. Brigid returned to her metaphor likening CEE engagement to being tied to a set of train tracks with an approaching train:

> *"What it <u>feels</u> like is the I'm on a set of train tracks and I'm kind of tied to these train tracks there's a train coming and I'm <u>screaming</u> at the top of my head like 'there's a <u>train</u> coming there's a <u>train</u> coming' (.) and I can hear it getting closer and <u>all</u> the people around me are just going like 'oh don't worry I'm sure it won't hit you I'm sure you'll be fine I'm sure it will be okay'"* – [Brigid]

This metaphor expressed a nightmarish quality associated with this sense of isolation and well-meaning false reassurance from others in the face of an imminent threat of global extinction.

Theme 3: It's a Relief not Having to Hide

The third theme, with its two subthemes, explored a core idea related to secrecy and hiding expressed in various ways throughout the dataset, and a sense of relief when feeling able to relate authentically to others. This theme is exemplified by the quote below.

When talking about building relationships within a CEE activist group, Dave spoke of the feeling of respite when spending time with people who shared his CEE engagement rather than having to censor himself with others:

> *"To have that respite from the rest of life where you have to just constantly bite your tongue as your friends describe their erm ridiculously high resource resource-intensive lifestyles […] as if it's like something to celebrate (.) erm yeah it is a relief"* – [Dave]

In this quote, Dave experiences the materialistic focus of his friends as a barrier to authentic relating, and hints at the cognitive and emotional labour of suppressing his true feelings.

3.1. Feeling the Need to Hide

This subtheme captured how some participants have experienced being positioned as extreme, or a sense of stigma associated with an activist identity, and fear of social judgement. Some participants linked feeling the need to hide with their experiences in childhood. Hiding can be seen as a form of coping with the difficulties experienced when going against social norms and having to hide the extent of CEE engagement or activism. Hiding also related to negative repercussions of CEE activism, including the devastating impacts of undercover policing on activist communities.

Some participants reflected on the role their upbringing or childhood experiences played in feeling more inhibited in expressing themselves. For example, Claire spoke of how difficult childhood experiences such as bullying or parental criticism

influenced a sense of it feeling unsafe to be honest about her thoughts and feelings about *"climate change or about anything else"*:

> *"My experience was of having autism but not being diagnosed knowing I was different but not knowing why I sort of I tried to compensate with that by copying other people and trying to act like them so I think I'm actually a people pleaser and I'm really scared to be honest about how I think and feel"* – [Claire]

Claire's experience of having to compensate or please others to be able to experience a sense of social safety can make it harder to express herself – with regards to the CEE and more generally. Similarly, April also spoke of her upbringing in relation to expressing herself in certain relationships:

> *"I guess lots of stuff I just don't say I just don't talk about yeah I mean I guess having come from a childhood where I wasn't encouraged to be myself"* – [April]

April and Claire explicitly link their childhood experiences to feeling less able to be themselves or talk about the CEE with others in adulthood.

Some participants spoke of concern about being seen as *"weird"* by others in their wider social circles. In the following extract, for example, Claire expressed concern about being seen by others as a *"weirdo hippy"*:

> *"I think yeah I'm quite self-conscious and worried about being judged I I don't want to talk to my family or my colleagues as much as I'd like about climate change, I'm worried they think I'm a weirdo hippy"* – [Claire]

Concern about being positioned as *"weird"* could be seen as an awareness of transgressing social norms within certain social groups. The use of the word *"weird"* is interesting to consider in relation to its older meanings related to being fated or destined and could be taken in a prophetic sense, warning of the impacts of the CEE.

There was also a pragmatic aspect to hiding the extent of certain actions that may be met with social disapproval in participants' wider social circles. For example, Lily expressed that she would be selective about whom she might speak to about certain actions for fear of social disapproval or loss of relationships:

> *"There would certainly would be some limits to actions that some of my friends wouldn't <u>like</u> but then I wouldn't maybe let them know that I was doing those"* – [Lily]

However, Lily suggested that this anticipated social disapproval would not be a deterrent to acting. Similarly, Faith expressed feeling a need to hide her CEE campaigning from a friend who believes *"you're just doing it 'cos you want to feel busy and it makes you feel good"*:

> *"With [my friend] I kind of I just <u>hide</u> the fact I'm still doing some campaigning 'cos she'll just be cross with me she she just thinks I do it for myself so I don't think she'll ever really accept that y'know I'm a significant campaigner"* – [Faith]

The statement above from Faith's friend sounds quite attacking and dismissive of Faith's efforts, demonstrating the emotional and relational risks of CEE activism. Hiding the extent of CEE campaigning is one way of continuing activism while managing some of these relational risks.

Although participants spoke of the CEE as difficult to talk about with most people, some participants expressed feeling particularly constrained in expressing their feelings about the CEE within professional contexts. For example, Lily spoke of her feelings of frustration about the CEE feeling more difficult to talk about with *"funders or people that are more <u>official</u>"*:

> *"<u>That's</u> what I feel but I can't talk about that that's <u>inappropriate</u> for me to say that erm I <u>think</u> it's inappropriate I don't know it's <u>really</u> hard y'know*" – [Lily]

Lily expressed feeling it would be inappropriate to discuss the CEE in this context, although expressed some feelings of doubt about this. This hesitance or uncertainty about discussing the CEE in more official or professional contexts could be seen as the operation of power dynamics within certain social settings. This operation of power was also evident in representations of the CEE across wider social institutions. In the extract below, Klara expressed feeling aware of how CEE protests are reported by the media:

> *"Things that get into the news where people y'know are demonstrating or blocking a road or whatever and and then what tends to get reported is more where it's been an issue*" – [Klara]

Klara did not self-identify as an activist, and reflected on an awareness of being associated with others who might be positioned as extreme in their opinions as "*there's people out there that probably tar people with the same brush".* This suggests a wariness in Klara of the potential stigma of being linked to activists.

In the following extract April talked about internalised police repression influencing a sense of having to hide:

> *"I think I've taken that in because of all that kind of police attention and police repression and y'know clearly we're in the right erm but that kind of attention on you makes you feel a bit like you've got to hide what you're doing and hide what you're thinking that you're not right and I so I- I'm always quite backward with coming forward about m- my stance on things and what I believe y'know with [my husband]'s parents so it's not something that I would feel comfortable going down that line with them"* - [April]

April expressed that she is seen as extreme in the *"eyes of the state*". This evokes a sense of surveillance, judgement, and lack of safety, thus imposing a stigmatised identity which can require caution in revealing views about the CEE within personal relationships when views are not shared. This perception of a stigmatised identity was also present in participants expressing an awareness of how they might be perceived and worries about social judgement.

Some participants reported a sense of enforced secrecy related to the negative repercussions of their CEE activism. Claire reflected below on the experience of being reprimanded at work and being concerned about losing her job:

> *"I got called into a meeting with my boss's boss and she was <u>trying</u> to be very nice it was sort of very Orwellian and patronising just saying 'oh we support climate action but we can't have you talking to the press without authorisation again'"* – [Claire]

Claire spoke of the material risk of losing her job due to speaking about climate action *"without authorisation"*. The use of the word *"Orwellian"* echoes April's experience of control and surveillance. This sense of enforced secrecy also related to the undercover policing scandal. This state-sanctioned social betrayal is in stark contrast to the level of trust and camaraderie that participants reported experiencing through taking part in collective action. The quotation below from April demonstrates how the activist community was destroyed and how *"lots of people stopped doing activism"* due to the relational impacts of undercover policing:

> *"The whole movement is was shattered like it's (.) erm by the y'know he'd been our (.) one of our closest friends for [nine] years"* – [April]

April expressed a keen sense of loss of relationships resulting from this betrayal and highlighted this as a major factor in her taking a step back from direct action.

3.2. Feeling Able to Be Yourself

The second subtheme related to CEE engagement as an important aspect of participants' identities and seeking respite from others' lack of engagement. Upbringing played a role in feeling able to express oneself, and representation in the climate movement encouraged some participants' engagement. Engaging in activism offered respite from lack of CEE engagement in other relationships, and a sense of social validation. However, some participants were aware of not limiting relationships to others who agree with them. Shared CEE engagement and

emotionally honest conversations supported closeness and authentic relating in personal relationships, regardless. Some participants reported that their relationships felt strengthened by differences in CEE engagement when able to communicate openly.

Some participants spoke of their engagement with the CEE as reflecting a core part of who they were. For example, in the quote below, Lily spoke of a friend who thought her CEE involvement was admirable:

> *"She said she was amazed by the way I was and I thought 'well it's not something that I work at it's how I am' that's it it's how I am I can't be other than concerned"* – [Lily]

This suggests that, for Lily, not feeling concerned about others and the planet would be inconceivable. This is interesting to consider from the perspective of Lily's longer-term activism, and how this experience may differ for participants whose CEE engagement is more recent. For example, Klara expressed that she linked her increased CEE engagement with increased expression of different parts of herself:

> *"Giving a stronger voice to certain parts of myself"* – [Klara]

This suggests that Klara experiences some parts of herself as less connected to the CEE, possibly linked to fulfilling different social roles. Klara expressed that she was allowing different aspects of herself to *"come to the fore"* and spoke of wanting this to guide her change in career so that it felt more aligned with her values.

In contrast to participants' experiences in the subtheme above, Brigid spoke of feeling less hesitant in talking about her feelings about the CEE and related this to being encouraged to be open about her emotions while growing up:

> *"I mean erm I'm not y'know shy about talking about it I've been brought up to be quite erm open about my emotions"* – [Brigid]

Brigid said that *"a burden shared is a burden halved"* and *"why not talk about it",* demonstrating that talking about difficulties may come more naturally to her. These

reflections demonstrate the possible role of early relational experiences in feeling more able to relate authentically to others or express oneself regarding the CEE.

Seeing oneself represented in the climate movement encouraged participants' engagement. For example, Faith's experience of hearing about the science of the CEE from other Christians influenced her increased engagement:

> *"It was the actual science erm in the context of y'know Christians who are saying yeah y'know 'we're <u>Christians</u> and y'know we still think we're messing up and y'know we've got the capability to wreck the Earth and we are doing that'"* – [Faith]

Faith's experience of identifying with other Christians who were already engaged in the CEE was a pivotal moment in her engagement. Similarly, Claire also reported seeing herself represented in Greta Thunberg's climate activism and feeling inspired by this:

> *"With Greta Thunberg that was one of the things which <u>inspired</u> me to get involved with environment sort of seeing someone who's a bit like me like an autistic teenage girl like I was saying oh like really really saying 'we need to do stuff' […] and not being afraid to speak out it made me think I could do it too"* – [Claire]

This demonstrates the importance of diverse voices within the climate movement, both in terms of encouraging wider engagement across social groups as well as helping people to feel more confident in expressing themselves in relation to the CEE.

Although some participants experienced pressures to maintain activist group hopefulness by not speaking as openly about their difficult emotions about the CEE, engaging in activism generally provided opportunities for feeling able to relate more authentically to others. Speaking of her experience of taking part in a Work That Reconnects (Macy & Brown, 2014) workshop within a CEE activist group, Claire

expressed that it felt comforting have a space to talk openly about her feelings about the CEE:

> *"That was really (.) erm that felt really (.) no- not good but sort of it was quite comforting to be able to talk frankly about feelings of anxiety and anger around the climate crisis"* – [Claire]

This was clearly a valuable opportunity for Claire to feel able to express difficult emotions about the CEE. Many participants discussed feelings of closeness and acceptance experienced in personal relationships with people who were similarly engaged in the CEE:

> *"I already felt most effortlessly myself around those two people and able just to talk about it freely and they're the people who (.) then that makes me think well maybe that's what friendship is to me is just finding someone who agrees with me ((laughs))"* – [Dave]

In the quote above, Dave expressed how he experiences this as being able to be authentically himself within the relationships with his brother and a friend who shared his CEE engagement. Within both these relationships, there was a sense of shared understanding and values in addition to the history of the relationship. Dave also seems to be questioning his understanding of friendship, and his laughter might suggest a level of discomfort or self-consciousness about preferring friendships with people with similar views. Comparably, in the extract below Juliet spoke about how she would struggle to have a quality relationship with her parents if they did not share some degree of her CEE engagement:

> *"I move forward a bit faster than my parents uh (.) but still I I know that they're doing their bit and I know they're doing a lot still so erm (.) yeah I'm really glad ha I think otherwise it would be really complicated to have a relationship with them (.) like a (.) quality one"* – [Juliet]

Thus, although many participants expressed that shared CEE engagement often fostered closeness within relationships and an ability to be oneself, some participants also acknowledged that it could be problematic to solely spend time

with people who shared their views.

Klara spoke of friendships in the last year which have become *"very very close and really important as a source of support"*. She related this to an increase in emotionally honest conversations and changes within herself:

> *"With whom conversations have just become (.) I don't know much more emotionally honest much more um vulnerable (.) I mean 'cos I I've had a really difficult year in terms of like mental health"* – [Klara]

Being more vulnerable with others, during mental health difficulties, meant an increased closeness and depth within these relationships. Brigid spoke of the change she has noticed in her relationship with her father, and how their relationship felt strengthened by communicating about their differences in CEE engagement:

> *"Definitely (.) enjoyed having these discussions but it's only been in the last couple of years that he's started to really express that to me and has said y'know said things for example like y'know just erm a propos of nothing just like 'oh you're a nice person [Brigid]' or 'oh you're a really interesting person' or whatever and that's kind of something that mum and [her wife] would do y'know they'd express that positive emotion whereas it's only really recently that my dad started to do that"* – [Brigid]

Brigid's experience of this change in her relationship with her father suggests that through more open discussions about the CEE, this has also encouraged her father to be more verbally expressive about his feelings towards her in general.

Theme 4: Planting Seeds for Change Through Relationships

The fourth theme related to small changes having possible wider effects through networks of social relationships, both in terms of influences on participants' own CEE engagement and their influence on others' engagement. These changes rippled outwards through personal relationships and wider society. Participants experienced personal actions around the CEE acting as a springboard

for discussion and felt inspired by actions of others. Climate-related actions were able to appeal to different values held by others, even if views around the CEE were not shared. Through action and discussion, perceived social norms around the CEE were able to shift within different social settings, including within the workplace. Engagement and activism were noted as growing over time. For some participants, their upbringing played a role in their initial awareness and engagement with the CEE. Relationships were part of this journey, as relationships to activist groups shifted over the course of engagement, and family and friends grew more accepting of CEE engagement.

Some participants linked their CEE engagement with their upbringing. In the quote below, Grace explained how her parents helped to instil a sense of care for the environment:

> *"As a child my we were quite they were always quite hot on the recycling"* – [Grace]

Juliet also reflected on the role her parents had in her CEE engagement and that this was *"the first step I had understanding what was going on"*. Despite her parents not being activists, Juliet said that *"they've always had something about protecting the environment"*:

> *"I'm glad my parents get it I think my parents were actually the <u>reason</u> why I got interested"*– [Juliet]

This shows that shared values can be more important than shared behaviour. However, other participants did not experience differences in family values as a barrier to their own CEE engagement. Some participants spoke instead of the role of friendships in their climate engagement. For example, Ed spoke of his awareness of the CEE *"filtering in in different ways"* including the friendship below:

> *"He got involved with [CEE activist group] more he has been and has been more involved than I have been but he was on the first [protest] in [capital city] and I happened to go along a bit to that just pop in just literally walk*

across [the bridge] erm so I was aware then" – [Ed]

This shows that a close friend who was more engaged in the CEE encouraged Ed to become more aware of and engaged in activism himself, suggesting a diversity of pathways to increased CEE engagement.

The seed can be planted both ways - from participants to others in their lives and from others to participants. In the extract below, Ed expressed how relationships mutually influence each other:

> *"It's a ripple I mean none of us are islands are we so it affect- we're affected by one of the herd is what 'why why why are they y'know why are they standing on their heads screaming' y'know they they notice"* – [Ed]

Ed expressed that through noticing the emotional engagement of others with the urgency and magnitude of the CEE, this can ripple outwards.

Many participants reflected on the impact they had on others' CEE engagement. For example, Juliet talked about noticing this growth over time:

> *"Looking back, it's like 'alright they went from there to there so clearly the conversation we had at some point uh I mean they grew up in them and now they've made some changes in their lives'*" – [Juliet]

Juliet experienced this as a process of change started through conversations had with others and influencing how friends and family were living their lives. This change was not something that was immediately visible, but at times was a slower process with seeds sprouting below the soil and roots spreading unseen. Similarly, Hannah gave an example of how her *"boyfriend's mum's now vegetarian as well"* as one of the changes she has noticed following conversations she has had with friends and family. In the quote below, Hannah expressed how seeing these changes motivates her:

> *"All my friends who aren't interested are going 'you're go- going protesting on your birthday' and I'm like I can't think of anything better on my birthday*

erm and then I guess for my friends who aren't interested the fact that then they're not doing it like I see very subtle changes just again drives me to do it even more" – [Hannah]

The seeds of change planted by Hannah in others have sprouted, nourishing her activism further. Dave also voiced a sense of influencing his friends' actions in relation to the CEE:

"I think of myself as someone who (.) more often my friends will say to me 'oh actually we we're having one vegan night a week now because of the conversations we've had with you'" – [Dave]

This demonstrates the importance of having conversations about the CEE. Similarly, Grace expressed how through discussion and making individual changes, others notice this and start to shift in their CEE engagement:

"I think it's erm probably opened up some of my relationships with other people a little bit because we've erm (.) more got them round to our way- yeah we've sort of discussed it a bit more openly and in some ways, I know we we do avoid erm the big talks but just by changing the way we do things I think that they've picked up on that" – [Grace]

Grace experienced this as having a positive impact on relationships with others, through cultivating openness. Many participants also expressed how personal actions around the CEE can act as a springboard for discussion, as illustrated in Klara's quote below:

"I've probably talked about with friends like practical changes that we've made or things that or y'know if you kind of bounce ideas off other people and that kind of thing" – [Klara]

Sharing ideas with others regarding CEE actions helps to shift social norms and practices. Some participants also spoke of actively trying to encourage CEE engagement within the workplace:

"This friend from work who's very much instigated this climate group" – [Ed]

Ed described his friend as starting a climate group that he was involved with at work, demonstrating the importance of allies to help shift CEE engagement within different social spheres. Klara also talked about how her children's awareness of the CEE was reinforced by conversations both at home and in their school:

"*It's not <u>just</u> they're getting a lone voice do y'know what I mean it's not an influence that's just coming from one place"* – [Klara]

This suggests that although planting a seed for CEE engagement can happen within individual relationships, sowing seeds in different communities and institutions can reinforce the importance of CEE engagement.

Participants also spoke of how others could be supportive of certain CEE actions, even if they were not engaged with the CEE. For example, Grace reflected on this experience with her father:

"My dad is the same in that I think he approves of he's very elderly he can't hear at all but he approves of a lot of the farming things we do and a lot of things that harking back to the way things were done in the sort of fifties when when he was young" – [Grace]

This demonstrates that climate-related actions can appeal to different values held by others, even if views around the CEE were not shared, including a sense of nostalgia or shared history. Brigid reflected on how she makes the CEE *"more real"* for her friends and family, and related this to exposing them to information they might otherwise not be aware of or might not engage with:

"I <u>think</u> my friends and my family erm (.) y'know I think it's good that they've got they <u>know</u> someone who's part of [CEE activist group] because again they just get exposed to a lot of information they won't get exposed to <u>otherwise</u>" – [Brigid]

Brigid's experience suggests that through being open with family and friends about being part of a CEE activist group, it is harder for them to keep their heads buried in the sand. In addition to noticing their friends' and families' budding CEE engagement, participants also reflected on their own growing engagement. For example, Hannah reflected on how her relationship to a CEE activist group had changed as she *"used to be quite resistant to them and didn't really understand why they did what they do"*. Hannah spoke of how her CEE engagement had become less difficult within friendship groups:

> *"It's nice for me to see that things did used to be quite difficult <u>with</u> my friendship groups whereas now (.) like I'm in quite a good place with it all"* – [Hannah]

Dave also expressed this sense of growth within his relationship with his parents:

> *"It's not been negative in any case I don't think it's damaged our relationship (.) it just took some effort to work it out which I guess is an ongoing process so yeah (.) yeah that's been fine (.) I mean they have also said they're really proud of us for doing this kind of thing so (.) that's nice to hear"* – [Dave]

Although Dave's parents were concerned for him and his brother regarding the negative repercussions of their CEE activism, their ongoing journey as a family meant that they were able to express a sense of pride in their actions despite their differences.

Although participants spoke of noticing changes germinating more slowly in others, some participants expressed finding the pandemic hopeful for the CEE as it helped them to see that large scale changes can occur quickly:

> *"When COVID happened and suddenly people weren't driving or flying and we saw a <u>dip</u> in the in the emissions erm and I think there was this great sense of <u>hope</u> actually" – [Faith]*

Faith experienced the rate of change during the COVID-19 pandemic as hopeful for the scale of change needed for the CEE.

This chapter has detailed the four themes and associated subthemes generated through a reflexive TA of the data collected. These themes related to challenges in sustaining CEE actions and the role of supportive relationships within this, the precarity associated with interpersonal emotional management while engaging with the CEE, experiences of secrecy and hiding and the sense of relief when feeling able to relate authentically to others, and how small changes can have possible wider effects through networks of social relationships. These themes have been illustrated with prominent participant quotes and interpreted in relation to the research questions. In the subsequent chapter, these findings will be explored in more depth in relation to existing literature and their implications will be considered.

Discussion

Summary of Findings

The aims of this study were to improve understandings of how individuals who are emotionally engaging with climate change experience their social relationships, and to explore the role of social relationships in individual and collective action in response to the CEE. This has been achieved by exploring the relational experiences of people engaging with the CEE through qualitative interviews with sociograms as an additional elicitation tool, providing rich accounts. Taking a relational perspective, which sees patterns of thoughts, emotions and behaviours as directly related to patterns of interpersonal relationships (DeYoung, 2015), allowed for theoretical integration in this complex area. Considering how humanity's neglected relationship to the Earth leads to many environmental, social, and psychological problems (Higley & Milton, 2008), this relational stance is of particular importance as it emphasises a person's embeddedness in their wider contexts (Kuchuk, 2021; Manafi, 2010).

This study developed four themes and associated subthemes. The first theme highlighted pressures related to sustainable CEE activism and the role of social relationships in supporting this. The second theme centred on difficulties in managing one's own emotions and those of others while engaging with the CEE. The third theme focused on the challenges and opportunities for relating authentically through CEE engagement. The final theme captured experiences of mutual influence through relationships where small changes can have wider effects. This chapter will further consider the findings of this study in relation to the existing literature, reflecting on their implications and practical applications to the field of counselling psychology and more widely. The methodology of sociograms incorporated into semi-structured interviews will be considered in relation to future qualitative research directions in counselling psychology. Limitations of the project will be discussed, and opportunities for future research outlined. Finally, the conclusions of the research will be summarised.

Distancing or Deepening of Relationships Through CEE Engagement

This research supports existing literature regarding the difficulties that individuals can experience in social contexts with others who are not similarly engaging with the CEE (Howard, 2022; Randall, 2009). This was often challenging for many participants, resulting in increased distance or tension within personal relationships as evident in the themes *'walking the tightrope: interpersonal emotional management'* and *'it's a relief not having to hide'*. Many participants expressed feelings of sadness, powerlessness, and frustration regarding the perceived lack of CEE engagement within their relationships. At times, there was a risk of loss of relationship. Existing research into consequences of activist participation has identified formation of new relationships or the erasure of previous relationships (Vestergren et al., 2017); the current study highlights participant experiences of these processes of relationship regulation and will consider these in more depth throughout this section.

A few participants expressed how some relationships were too challenging to maintain in the face of significant differences in engagement, described by Juliet as requiring *"just too much energy"*. This pruning of relationships could be seen as a form of polarisation, which could reduce cross-societal concern about the CEE (Clarke et al., 2020). Maintaining environmentally harmful everyday practices and identities despite CEE awareness involves processes of cognitive dissonance and polarisation as individuals attempt to maintain their existing beliefs regarding their ecological habitus (Brulle & Norgaard, 2019), and may require the ending of relationships that challenge this. For example, April spoke of how *"some friendships were damaged"* and one *"hasn't repaired"* following this despite her attempts to reconcile. A few participants also spoke of feeling more distant from friends and family when experiencing a sense of conflict about loved ones' focus on materialism, a possible clash between more individual-oriented or collective-oriented values (Burroughs & Rindfleisch, 2002). When materialistic values are more central to an individual's value system, this can have negative impacts on wellbeing, interpersonal and community connection, and ecological health (Kasser et al., 2004). Thus, the promotion of materialistic values through capitalist systems could be seen as posing barriers to fully connecting with others and the Earth.

Participants also shared ways in which they tried to preserve relationships despite differences in CEE engagement. Some participants compartmentalised their CEE engagement to maintain certain valued relationships, described by Faith as how in relationships *"you have a little wall inside your mind"*. Howard's (2022) research into parenting relationships and CEE activism usefully highlighted how activists often needed to disengage from their climate-related emotions in everyday family life to function in their roles as parents or partners. The findings of the current study echoed this, as participants at times adapted their engagement with the CEE within their relationships to fulfil various social roles. However, the current study adds to these findings by looking more broadly at relational experiences within a wider range of social contexts. This highlighted how participants adapt or compartmentalise their engagement to maintain relationships with family members, friends, partners, colleagues, or within climate activist groups.

One of the strategies employed by many participants to preserve relationships was avoiding discussing the CEE within certain relationships if discussions felt unproductive or caused relationship difficulties. This was described as trying to *"keep it sweet"*, agreeing to *"rule out things"* or trying *"not to talk about contentious stuff"* within these relationships. Howard et al.'s (2021) qualitative research found that climate change was rarely discussed with extended family, particularly older relatives. The current study challenges this as many participants spoke of persisting in having discussions about the CEE within different relationships, including with older relatives. Participants adapted their communication to foster better dialogue about the CEE within their relationships even if the degree of CEE engagement was not shared. This was described by Dave as "*a difficult skill"* that he has had to develop around continuing to discuss the CEE with friends while *"not making them feel bad for it but also not <u>lying</u> and not avoiding the truth of it"*. Supporting people to talk about the CEE productively with their social networks is important (Wang et al., 2020). Some participants expressed that adopting a more compassionate or empathetic approach was helpful in having more rewarding conversations about the CEE within their relationships. This approach is also recommended by the #Talking Climate Handbook (Webster & Marshall, 2019).

Most participants, however, spoke of the deepening of some relationships through their CEE engagement, both through increased openness within existing personal relationships and through forming new relationships within CEE groups. This was particularly prominent in the themes *'sustainable activism: the 'good enough' climate activist'* and *'it's a relief not having to hide'*. Many participants spoke of appreciating their existing personal relationships where CEE engagement was shared, feeling closer to and more able to be themselves around these people. Increased openness within existing personal relationships when discussing the CEE, despite differences in engagement, was highlighted by some participants as something that had enriched their relationships. For example, Brigid reflected on how through having these discussions with her dad *"he's started to really express"* more verbally his love and appreciation of her. These experiences of increased vulnerability and openness within relationships through discussions about the CEE were seen by participants as part of ongoing processes of change within their social relationships.

Similar to findings of existing research regarding bonds formed with fellow activists (Howard, 2022; Vestergren et al., 2017), all participants spoke of the relationships formed through their CEE engagement or activism. However, Howard (2022) refers to feelings of 'affection' with fellow activists. Most participants in the current study spoke vividly of feelings of closeness within these CEE or activist groups, using words such as *"family"*, *"church"*, *"home"* and *"tribe"* to describe this keen sense of belonging. Therefore, the current study argues that the relational bonds formed are often deeper than simple affection.

Shaping and Being Shaped by Social Relationships

Many participants highlighted the role of early relationships in subsequent styles of relating to self and others, with present echoing past experiences (Curtis & Hirsch, 2003). Some participants related their upbringing and childhood experiences to how able they felt to express their emotions or views about the CEE. In the theme *'it's a relief not having to hide'*, participants linked their early experiences of feeling encouraged in being themselves to feeling able to be more open with others about the CEE; participants who had early experiences of feeling

discouraged related this to feeling less able to be open. Object relational and attachment theories can add emotional depth to ecopsychology through accentuating how people bring their relational histories and memories to their encounters with the world (Chawla, 2007). Considering this from an object relational perspective, an inhibition in self-expression could be seen as the formation of a compliant or false self (Winnicott, 1965/2018). This distinction between true self and false self is not an absolute separation, but is a useful concept to consider contexts of feeling able to be more or less authentic in relationships (Adams, 2006). Loving, attentive and emotionally attuned bonds between child and caregiver encourage greater interpersonal vulnerability, which promote authenticity rather than presenting a self built for conditional acceptance (Adame, 2022).

Additionally, some participants spoke of their early family influences on their initial CEE engagement. This influence of family of origin culture and lifestyle was noted by several participants, particularly regarding ecological thinking and sparing resources. For example, in the theme *'planting seeds for change through relationships'*, Juliet described her parents as *"actually the reason why I got interested".* These participants credited their upbringing with beginning their CEE awareness and engagement. This adds to existing research regarding the influence of family role models on fostering care for the natural world (Chawla, 2007) and environmental identity formation (Dewey, 2021). Other participants, however, expressed longstanding political and environmental differences with their families of origin. These results add insight into more interpersonal and situational dimensions of pro-environmental identity formation (Whitmarsh & O'Neill, 2010), by considering the ongoing role of relationships in fostering care for the environment and recognising the diversity of pathways to CEE engagement.

The theme '*planting seeds for change through relationships'* offered a view of relationships as mutually influencing and with the potential for gradual changes to rapidly tip over into a qualitative shift (Hoggett, 2019), contributing to an understanding of how these processes of CEE engagement are experienced through relationships. Ongoing influence of relationships was evident in CEE engagement, with some participants noting how their journey of engagement had been shaped

by a friend's earlier involvement in CEE actions or how their journey of engagement was alongside a sibling's. For example, Ed reflected on how a close friend of his was initially involved in a climate activist group and this encouraged him *"to go along a bit"* to a protest. This relational perspective enables a view of individuals as relational beings within varying networks of social relationships, rather than solely individuals within particular groups (Van Zomeren, 2015).

This study supported existing literature related to concern about the CEE not seeming to translate into everyday social interactions (Leiserowitz et al., 2019; Steentjes et al., 2017). This was especially noticeable in the subthemes '*"people don't want to talk about it don't want to know about it" – facing others' denial'* and *'feeling the need to hide'*. This social 'climate silence' can be pervasive (Corner & Clarke, 2016) and at times participants experienced this inhibition in talking about the CEE. This study's findings also echoed Norgaard's (2006b) research related to socially organised denial around the CEE, which drew on Zerubavel's (2002) work on social rules of focusing attention. Denial has intrapsychic and interpsychic mechanisms within social systems that are willing to ignore potentially turbulent information (Zerubavel, 2002), and these unconscious processes were at play in patterns of relating within some of the participants' relationships. However, participants spoke of the efforts they made in talking about the CEE within different social settings and how these discussions could be sparked by individual actions noticed by others. This echoes a point in the #Talking Climate Handbook about how to have conversations about the climate in everyday life, as actions can serve as a starting point for conversations (Webster & Marshall, 2019).

Existing explanations for social inertia regarding the CEE are disjointed (Brulle & Norgaard, 2019). The CEE challenges the everyday practices defining the 'ecological habitus' of most Western citizens (Brulle & Norgaard, 2019). Many participants, however, spoke of how adapting their communication and persisting in talking about the CEE with others formed part of shifting social norms and practices within their social groups, regarding awareness of and openness to discussing the CEE. Some participants also spoke of how their pro-climate actions appealed to values held by others in their lives, such as tradition. In the theme *'planting seeds for change through relationships'*, Grace described how, despite not

sharing her CEE engagement, her dad *"approves of a lot of the farming things we do and a lot of things that harking back to the way things were done"*. This idea of appealing to shared values fits with the Britain Talks Climate initiative, which recognises that different segments of British society are all worried about the CEE to some degree and considers how to shape national discussion in line with these values (Wang et al., 2020). Therefore, the current study supports this guidance related to adapting communication within relationships to appeal to shared values rather than more polarising approaches to climate engagement.

Although the CEE is a wider systemic issue with responses undermined by operations of power and vested interests (Beder, 2014), behaviour change within individuals' social networks is then able to shift social norms or practices available within the ecological habitus. This was described by Grace as "*just by changing the way we do things I think that they've picked up on <u>that</u>".* Participants expressed a sense of efficacy in noticing these changes in CEE engagement within their social groups, and feedback from family and friends on how they had been influenced by participants was encouraging and offered a sense of hope which participants reported as motivating further action, described by Hannah as how seeing *"very subtle changes just again drives me to do it even more"*. Similar findings were reported by Howard (2022) regarding momentary hopefulness experienced when participants noticed how their social relationships had been influenced to take their own forms of CEE action. Some participants also spoke of their efforts to encourage discussion and pro-climate action within the workplace. At times this was met with institutional resistance, as seen in Claire's experience of being reprimanded at work. However, workplace and school-based initiatives were important ways of shifting social norms and reinforcing the importance of CEE engagement, expressed by Klara as *"it's not an influence that's just coming from one place".*

Avoiding dualistic thinking which separates individuals and society (Räthzel & Uzzell, 2009), the findings of this study suggest that there is a place for individual behaviour change embedded within collectives and wider social systems. Considering individuals as embedded within their various social networks, witnessing individual behaviour change can act as a catalyst for normative tipping points and shift the repertoire of available social practices within the ecological

habitus. This can also create a feedback loop through further motivating individuals already engaging with the CEE.

Emotions About the CEE Are a Relational Experience

The theme *'walking the tightrope: interpersonal emotional management'* focused on relational processes of emotional management. Participants channelled difficult emotions into congruent CEE action, whether individual or collective. Many participants managed difficult emotions about the CEE by looking for more hopeful aspects, whether this was hope through collective action or actions experienced as having tangible positive effects, such as growing food. These cognitive and emotional regulation strategies echoed past research regarding employing strategies of fostering emotions of hope or solidarity (Howard, 2022) or focusing on something one can do (Norgaard, 2006b).

This emotional management does not take place in isolation, as there are sociocultural norms of emotional experiencing and expression (Thoits, 2004). Emotions were interpersonally regulated, with many participants noticing the impacts of norms of emotional expression within differing private, public, or professional social contexts. Although there can be broader societal emotion norms, emotion norms can also differ across social groups and be experienced as 'feeling rules' (Hochschild, 1983). For example, Lily reflected on feeling inhibited in more official professional contexts *"that's what I feel but I can't talk about that that's inappropriate for me to say that"*. Many participants expressed a sense of socially appropriate or inappropriate emotions, described by Brigid as *"toxic positivity"*. These norms of emotional expression were experienced as restrictive and inhibiting. Some participants reported that loved ones struggled to witness their emotions about the CEE. These participants related this to loved ones not wanting to see them in pain or wanting to be able to enjoy their life together. Participants reported that this caused difficulties in close relationships when loved ones were left with feelings of helplessness due to being unable to 'fix' participants' distress with reassurance, described by Brigid as her boyfriend getting *"upset that I can't get rid of this worry that the apocalypse is coming"*. This tension experienced in close relationships could also be conceptualised as a form of defensive response

to a deeper emotional engagement with the CEE that loved ones may be unable to face. Although previous research has identified difficulties that individuals can experience in social contexts when others are not similarly engaging with the CEE (Randall, 2009), the current study has offered insight into these relational experiences.

Climate activist group emotional management was also noted by a few participants, particularly in subthemes *'breaking point: the emotional strain of the climate crisis'* and *'it's hard trying to be a good enough activist'*. These participants expressed that their depth of feeling about the CEE might be unhelpful to express in this context, due to impeding CEE action or what Claire described as the risk of *"dragging everyone else down"*. This could be seen as maintaining an acceptable degree of climate-related emotions for this social group and protecting a sense of collective efficacy within the group, maintaining motivational commitment to their purpose (Bandura, 2000). This echoes previous research regarding social processes of sustaining hope when hope is precarious, highlighting the communal-social element in the production of hope (Kleres & Wettergren, 2017). Randall and Hoggett (2019) highlight how activists were more able to express and discuss their feelings through developing a more supportive and emotionally literate culture than that of the climate scientists, although also acknowledge how activists go through a distancing process where difficult knowledge is not denied but is put into the background. The current study builds on these findings through suggesting that although there may be more spaces available to activists to express these difficult emotions, some activists can struggle to speak openly about difficult emotions within the group. However, all interviews for this study were conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic so it is possible that these supportive spaces were harder to access or that the emotional strain of the pandemic reduced people's capacity to bear difficult emotions in others. Despite these caveats, this study adds to existing research by highlighting how the maintenance of a sense of collective hope can be experienced as isolating for individuals within the group, who might be struggling to find a space where the depth of difficult emotions about the CEE can be expressed without censorship. This study underscores the importance of offering spaces where difficult emotions can be expressed and contained.

Similarly, participants modified their communication in social relationships so as not to overwhelm others when discussing the CEE, while still ensuring that discussions about the CEE take place. This was especially notable in the theme *'walking the tightrope: interpersonal emotional management'*, in Juliet's quote where she discusses talking about the CEE "*without (.) uh making people too uncomfortable knowing where to stop and giving the right amount of information*". This adapting of communication is helpful to consider in relation to the concept of the 'window of tolerance'. The 'window of tolerance' is a concept developed by Siegel (1999) and is a valuable model for understanding physiological and cognitive reactions to adversity or trauma (Welfare-Wilson et al., 2021). The window of tolerance can be usefully applied to the collective trauma of the CEE (Bednarek, 2021). It can help in considering hyperarousal or hypoarousal responses when facing difficult feelings about the CEE and staying within a range which allows one to remain connected to one's experience (Bednarek, 2019b). These related processes of adapting communication or emotional expression depending on social context could be seen as a means of regulating relationships or maintaining valued group memberships.

The Role of Relationships in Personally Sustainable Climate Action

Climate activism or other climate-related actions can be challenging to sustain in the face of resistance, both in terms of societal norms and repercussions for activism. Participants also spoke of the strain of persisting with communicating about the CEE and learning to do this more effectively while managing their own emotions and actions. The role of supportive existing relationships or new relationships within CEE groups was a vital source of validation, belonging and encouragement.

Some participants experienced a sense of security and unconditional positive regard (Rogers, 1957/2007) from their loved ones, regardless of potentially negative societal outcomes of their climate activism. This draws parallels with Ainsworth's (1963) concept of a 'secure base' in attachment theory. A secure base is defined as being able to explore the outside world with the ability to return knowing that one will be welcomed, physically and emotionally nourished,

comforted if distressed, and reassured if afraid (Bowlby, 1988). The concept of a secure base can be usefully applied to attachments in adulthood as well as childhood (Ainsworth, 1989), and considered in relation to exploration, accepting challenges, and taking risks in adulthood (Feeney & Thrush, 2010). Considering the role of a secure base in 'good enough' climate activism, it is interesting to note how a few participants spoke strikingly of their close sibling relationships supporting their activism. For example, Dave described his brother as *"absolutely like there for everything*". Siblings can serve as attachment objects, acting as a source of emotional security (Whiteman et al., 2011). In adulthood, attachment seems to be driven more by interpersonal needs such as trust, hope, self-disclosure, and relationship satisfaction rather than by biological needs (Welch & Houser, 2010). Secure adult friendship attachments involve high levels of hope for self and the relationship, high levels of trust in others, and high levels of self-disclosure and relationship satisfaction (Welch & Houser, 2010). The degree of closeness and belonging expressed by many participants in relation to collective action and CEE groups suggests the formation of adult attachment bonds.

This sense of social support was in stark contrast to the impacts of social betrayal through undercover policing. Research into the harm and trauma caused by the human rights abuses of undercover policing has identified dimensions of impact including ontological uncertainty, derailing of activists from environmentalism, and resilience of activists in the face of these abuses (Griffin, 2021). Although only one participant in this study shared her experience of being affected by undercover policing, her experience adds to research in this area by highlighting the ongoing impact of state surveillance on those targeted. The participant shared how the traumatic relational impacts of this betrayal can reduce feeling able to be open with others about CEE engagement, compounding the sense of isolation experienced by many participants in relation to the depth of their engagement with the CEE. Betrayal of trust through undercover policing is a traumatic experience of bonds being broken which can make it harder to form or maintain the relationships needed to sustain activism.

Other participants also spoke of their experiences of police opposition and negative media representations of non-violent protest. For example, Klara reflected

on feeling aware of how critical media portrayals of CEE protests could mean "*there's people out there that probably tar people with the same brush"* if expressing a strong opinion. These could be seen as forms of institutional resistance to possible disruption of the status quo of carbon-dependent lifestyles. Over the course of this research project, there has arguably been a rise in authoritarian legislation and erosion of human rights in the UK (Webber, 2022). This increases barriers to protest rights, and positions climate activists as enemies to public order which can be seen as a divide-and-rule tactic (Webber, 2023). Therefore, implications of this rise in authoritarianism for conversations with others about climate activism could include increased polarisation and stigmatisation of activist identities adding to the strain of sustaining activism.

Further contextualising the findings of this research within contemporary events and debates, divisions can also be present within the climate and environmental movement. Community climate groups which receive the most support are engaged in actions related to practical carbon-reduction rather than more political actions (Rootes, 2012). There can be tensions within and between climate activist groups on whether to focus on more disruptive methods or whether to aim to appeal to larger numbers of the general public. These tensions could be conceptualised as part of the radical flank effect. This effect is when more radical or unpopular tactics employed by one flank can increase support for groups seen as more moderate within the same movement (Simpson et al., 2022), as the Overton Window shifts in relation to the range of political ideas considered currently acceptable by the mainstream (Weintrobe, 2021). Although this suggests that varied forms of action are needed with the CEE movement, these powerful dynamics could be challenging for those already engaging with the climate crisis to navigate.

Activists can experience a sense of pressure related to engaging in the 'right' amount and type of activism, often conceived as direct action rather than online activism or everyday acts (Craddock, 2019). This narrative of an idealised activist identity was present in the subtheme *'it's hard trying to be a good enough activist'* which identified participant accounts of feelings of exhaustion in relation to CEE actions, difficulties taking a break from activism, and feelings of guilt about not

fulfilling this role. Some participants also spoke of unspoken pressures of self-sacrifice within CEE activist groups, echoing previous studies on social justice activists which have identified a 'culture of martyrdom' (Chen & Gorski, 2015; Gorski & Chen, 2015). This could also be conceptualised as activist overactivity as a form of defence against despair or loss of hope (Randall & Hoggett, 2019). Social norms and social identity can be integrated through social interaction, and discussions validating each other's beliefs can inspire confidence to coordinate, organise and act jointly on these beliefs (Smith et al., 2015). These processes of social change occur through the emergences of shared injunctive norms (the way the world should be) which define new collective identities (Smith et al., 2015). However, while important in facilitating collective action, these emergences of injunctive norms within activist groups can mean experiencing feelings of pressure to achieve this idealised identity to maintain a sense of group belonging or cohesion. Perfectionism has also been highlighted as a barrier to personally sustainable climate action (Kennedy-Woodard & Kennedy-Williams, 2022). The findings of the current study highlight that in addition to the relational and material risks that climate activists face, they may also be navigating internalised pressures that act as barriers to engaging in personally sustainable CEE action.

Although feeling supported in CEE engagement or activism was an important aspect of personally sustainable CEE action, participants also expressed a sense of isolation as despite feeling supported they did not feel the depth of their CEE engagement was understood and shared by others. These experiences were particularly striking in the subtheme *'"they're <u>not</u> tied to the train tracks with me" – support is not enough'*. Comparable to Howard's (2022) findings, in the current study many participants spoke of feeling emotionally supported by partners and loved ones, yet this experience of support did not fully alleviate feelings of difference or isolation due to feeling the depth of their CEE engagement was not understood. However, the current study differed from Howard's (2022) study by highlighting the dynamics of mutual influence through relationships and how family and friends can become more accepting and supportive of CEE engagement as seen in the subtheme *'feeling able to be yourself'* and the theme *'planting seeds for change through relationships'*. Like Howard's (2022) study, the current research

found that, although often an emotionally isolating experience if loved ones were less engaged in the CEE, family life could also help soothe some of the emotional demands of climate engagement. However, this study argues that in addition to periods of managing emotional engagement with the CEE to fulfil social roles, this soothing of some of the emotional impacts of climate engagement also occurred through loved ones offering a balance to internalised pressures of living up to an idealised activist identity. This was apparent in the subtheme *'a secure base: friends and family'* where Ian described his wife's perspective on needing to enjoy life as well as engage in protest as "*a very good corrective"* and where Brigid spoke of how feelings of guilt were reduced following discussions with her boyfriend around keeping *"a bit of stuff for you so that you still have the resources to <u>continue</u> to help people"*. 'Good enough' climate activism involves times of more active engagement as well as feeling able to take breaks from this engagement as needed, and to feel relationally supported and validated through these different phases.

Implications for Counselling Psychologists

An objective of this research was to add to existing guidance to enable therapists to more effectively support clients engaging emotionally with the CEE. The implications of this research for counselling psychologists and psychological therapists more broadly will be considered further in this section. A fundamental characteristic of counselling psychology is its relational ways of understanding therapeutic practice and the wider world (Milton, 2010b). As part of their practice, counselling psychologists already consider the wider contexts in which their clients are embedded. However, their relationship to the broader political and natural aspects of clients' lives can form part of richer assessment and formulation (Milton, 2010a). There is already valuable work around supporting people to engage with and act for social and ecological change, through emotionally reflexive methodologies which facilitate acknowledging, processing and potentially transforming emotions around social and environmental issues (Hamilton, 2019). One of these initiatives is The Work That Reconnects (Macy & Johnstone, 2012). The Work That Reconnects also highlights social support as an important pillar in maintaining activists' energy and motivation (Macy & Johnstone, 2012). However,

these initiatives may be less familiar outside of activist settings. This research adds to these existing resources and encourages counselling psychologists and psychological therapists to consider how they may be able to contribute to supporting CEE engagement within different settings.

This research noted how the intensity of emotions experienced in relation to the CEE can fluctuate over the course of engagement, and there can also be a reduction in discussing emotions about the CEE after longer term engagement as it can become a *"taken for granted"* topic. As outlined in the literature review, difficult emotions are an understandable and appropriate response to the CEE and should not be pathologised or 'treated' through psychological therapies (Bednarek, 2019a). However, this shifting emotional experience is important to consider as a counselling psychologist, as people engaging with the CEE may need different support at different times.

Counselling psychologists can act as a secure base (Bowlby, 1988) to explore these feelings and can help people consider how to channel their emotions into action. Counselling psychologists can provide the emotional support and reflection, both within and outside the therapy room, that enables and increases activism for socially-just causes. This research highlights how supportive relationships are vital in sustaining CEE engagement and action without overly employing psychological defences. These psychological defences can include shutting off emotions about the CEE when these become overwhelming, or overactivity as a form of manic defence (Randall, 2009). Some participants also spoke of feeling low or disappointed after collective action did not seem to have the hoped-for effect. It can be challenging if activist clients feel they have not been able to make the difference they had hoped for, and this can be something to explore in therapy (Samuels, 2017). An awareness of the potential cyclical aspects of engagement can help therapists in adapting to clients' varying needs.

Counselling psychologists can support CEE-engaged or CEE activist clients to consider what is personally sustainable CEE action. An awareness of the risks of overactivity or perfectionism can help psychological therapists to create a space where this can be considered. Encouraging clients to aspire to personally 'good enough' activism can reduce shame and self-criticism, and promote sustainable

action (Samuels, 2017). Counselling psychologists can also help clients to foster supportive relationships, whether this is deepening support within existing personal relationships or encouraging forming relationships within environmental or activist communities.

Participants expressed not feeling understood or feeling that others were not alongside them in their concern about the CEE, despite feeling supported. This could be an important consideration for therapeutic practice, as therapist self-disclosure of their own CEE engagement or concern could help foster an acknowledgement of potentially shared experience which may be missing in other relationships. Although therapist self-disclosure can be a complex area, judicious therapist self-disclosure can be a helpful intervention (Henretty & Levitt, 2010). The concept of shared trauma recognises that there are times when therapists are living through the same threats and disasters as their clients (Barry & Singer, 2022). Existing research investigating shared trauma has focused on natural disasters (Boulanger, 2013), the 9/11 terrorist attacks (Eidelson et al., 2003), and more recently the COVID-19 pandemic (Captari, 2020). There can be an increase in therapist self-disclosure when living through a shared trauma with clients (Tosone, 2011). This can be a beneficial therapeutic tool to express empathy, normalise trauma or fear, and express human connectedness (LaPorte et al., 2010). Although there is a lack of research in relation to therapist self-disclosure and the CEE as a shared trauma, findings from these related fields of research could be a useful starting point. A shared experience, however, is not enough reason to self-disclose, and all self-disclosures must be in the service of the client (LaPorte et al., 2010). An intersectional understanding of the unequal impacts and the range of responses to the CEE would be essential in considering how to approach therapist self-disclosure if indicated. A relational approach could support this co-creation of understanding of shared trauma (Barry & Singer, 2022), while acknowledging differences and retaining a focus on the client. Therapist reflexivity is key in considering how use of self might deepen the therapeutic relationship and be of most help to the client (Donati, 2016) when supporting them with climate-related distress.

An additional implication for counselling psychologists is considering how the relational aspects of the CEE can be incorporated into psychology training

programmes at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. This would help psychology students draw on the strengths of their training and consider opportunities for their involvement in promoting health for people and planet. It is important for counselling psychologists to consider their role in advocating social justice (Division of Counselling Psychology, 2020), whether this is through personal actions, community involvement, direct action initiatives or policy formation.

Psychological therapists also need to consider outreach to activists who are traumatised by action. Climate activists can be simultaneously navigating the emotional impacts of facing the reality of the climate crisis, and experiences of stigmatisation and repression in relation to their activism. Although activism can be empowering, frontline activists can experience fear, anxiety, and trauma in relation to challenging powerholders (Huxley & Lambrick, 2020). Non-violent direct action can carry with it the risks of experiencing physical violence, as well as arrest and subsequent legal difficulties. These risks associated with climate activism can also be greater for marginalised communities. Psychological therapists need to recognise the potentially traumatising effects of climate activism, and proactively offer support around these experiences. Current suggestions around support that psychologists can offer include accessible materials and training on understanding and responding to the range of psychological impacts of stress and trauma (Huxley & Lambrick, 2020). However, further consideration is needed in considering how best to support traumatised activists.

Recognition of the support that psychological therapists may need when working with traumatised activists is also important in sustaining this work. Counselling psychologists and psychological therapists may be experiencing their own psychological distress in relation to direct, indirect, and psychosocial impacts of the CEE. Witnessing activists' trauma may be challenging for psychological therapists depending on where they may be in their own journey of engagement with the CEE, and support around processing this needs to be available within clinical supervision and within professional contexts. A wider perspective of the support needed includes psychologists and psychological therapists feeling supported by their professional bodies if they receive a caution or are charged with an offence as a result of their own non-violent climate activism, with non-violent

climate activism needing to be viewed as embodying counselling psychology's value of promoting social justice. Further work is needed on investigating the support needs of counselling psychologists and psychological therapists when engaging in this area.

Implications for CEE Groups and Their Supporters

Another objective of this research was to share the key findings with organisations who are campaigning for improved responses to the CEE. Findings from this study could be relevant to CEE groups in considering the importance of personally sustainable action, the importance of supportive relationships within CEE groups, and feeling there are spaces in which to speak openly about feelings about the CEE. Although CEE groups often focus on action, the importance of sharing and processing emotions needs to be considered. This is an important aspect of certain CEE activist groups such as Extinction Rebellion, which attempts to embed a 'regenerative culture' within the group which emphasises the value of emotions and is based on self-care, people care, and planet care (Westwell & Bunting, 2020). However, this regenerative culture can be challenging to understand or practice (Westwell & Bunting, 2020). In this study, some participants reported struggling to prioritise accessing these regenerative or supportive spaces. Therefore, this study suggests that CEE groups could encourage more personally and collectively sustainable activism through acknowledging how overly employing individual and collective defences may lead to disengagement, isolation or overwhelm.

Opportunities for sharing the research more broadly within relevant communities could include collaborating with existing supportive structures within CEE groups to add to or create workshops focusing on the importance of relationships for facilitating and sustaining pro-climate actions. These workshops could be hosted within activist and environmental groups, and festivals promoting environmental action and sustainability. A brief guide for supporters could also be created, focusing on effectively supporting loved ones with their emotional and relational experiences of CEE engagement. This guide would highlight the importance of loved ones listening without minimising distress or denying the seriousness of the CEE, and communicating that they will provide a secure base for

action by expressing support regardless of the negative repercussions of CEE activism. The guide could also include the importance of loved ones encouraging self-care, connection, and engagement in other areas of life. Thus, providing a balance to the risks of overactivity and encouraging more personally sustainable action.

Reflections on the Use of Methods Within This Study

Reflexive TA is a qualitative method often used in counselling psychology research. The flexibility of reflexive TA allows it to be used with varied ontological and epistemological frameworks (Braun & Clarke, 2006). While reflexive TA is often used to analyse interview data, it is also used with more creative data collection methods such as story completion methods (Clarke et al., 2019). Although analysing the sociograms themselves was beyond the scope of this project, reflexive TA can also be employed in analysing visual data (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Combining sociograms of varying forms with interviews has been employed in social network research (Ryan et al., 2014; Tubaro et al., 2016). However, this study's use of semi-structured interviews with sociograms as an elicitation tool is novel within counselling psychology research. Ensuring that sociograms were completed at an early stage in the interviews meant that subsequent questions and prompts regularly referred to the completed sociograms. This helped to retain the focus on relational experiences while engaging with the CEE. This use of an additional visualisation aid within the interviews was a useful prompt for researcher and participants, enhancing participants' reflection processes and enabling an exploration of relational experiences in more depth.

Sociograms tend to be shaped by the time period in which they are being completed (Ryan et al., 2014). This is important to consider in relation to the research taking place during the COVID-19 pandemic, with all interviews taking place remotely as a result. For a study that was relational in focus, this is important context to consider regarding how it may have shaped the findings. Interviews were conducted at a time when varying degrees of COVID-19 lockdowns were in place in the UK. Many participants commented on how their relationships and social networks had been affected by COVID-19 and lockdowns. The COVID-19 pandemic

impacted both online and offline patterns of relating within the UK, as restricted physical mixing between households had relational costs for individuals, dyads, networks, and communities (Long et al., 2022). Some participants reflected that their sociograms may have differed if the interviews had taken place within a non-pandemic or non-lockdown context. Participant comments often related to an increased distancing in relationships due to being unable to meet with others in person. However, some participants spoke of increased closeness experienced within existing relationships through avenues such as regular online video calls with family in different countries or the formation of new groups online. The pandemic context of the research was also of relevance when considering the presence of children during some of the interviews, and how able participants may have felt to speak openly with others present in the house. There was a sense of connection and affinity experienced by the researcher in relation to the participants, as the interviews were an opportunity for connection with others living through the joint crises of the pandemic and climate.

Limitations

A key limitation of the study was the lack of ethnic diversity in the sample, as all participants identified as White, White British or White European despite substantial attempts to recruit participants holding more diverse ethnic identities. As a researcher of dual heritage with family living in the Global South, this lack of diverse voices in the research was a concern. Recruitment took place at a time of resurgence of national attention in the UK, raised by the Black Lives Matter movement, towards racism and racially motivated violence against people racialised as Black. It is possible that an oversampling of certain Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC) CEE groups around this time played a role in this study's recruitment difficulties. It is important not to overburden marginalised groups, who are already more affected by the CEE. However, the need to diversify who has a voice in climate related initiatives is a wider concern, as participation in climate change decision making is heavily skewed towards White men (Dietzel & Venn, 2021). The absence or marginalisation of working-class and BAME voices is an issue that has been identified in the environmental movement, a movement where

more mainstream environmental organisations in the UK and the United States are predominantly White and middle-class (Bell & Bevan, 2021). This lack of diversity within the sample means particular experiences will not have been captured.

Of important consideration is the transferability of the research, and who the findings apply to. The intention was to obtain a more heterogeneous sample to access a diversity of perspectives (Braun & Clarke, 2006). All but one participant self-identified as activists, although identifying as an activist was not an inclusion criterion for the study. A key inclusion criterion was feeling emotionally affected by the CEE as this has been identified by existing literature as key for engagement and action (McAdam, 2017; Wolf & Moser, 2011), and this study intended to explore experiences of people who were already engaged in the CEE. The self-identification of all but one participant as activists is highlighted here, as caution may need to be employed in applying the findings to climate activists. However, it is worth noting that an activist identity is not necessarily a straightforward identity to adopt, as activists can be associated with negative stereotypes (Bashir et al., 2013). There are also calls for a more 'moderate flank,' due to the proportion of the population that would be needed to be engaged with the CEE and who may not subjectively identify as 'environmentalists' (Cherry, 2019) or activists.

Although purposive sampling was used, participants volunteered for the study if they were interested in taking part. This could indicate that those who volunteered for the study may have had a higher motivation to act on or discuss the CEE than others within the groups sampled or within the wider population (Quimby & Angelique, 2011). However, as this was a qualitative study and was not purporting to offer generalisable results, this is not necessarily a limitation, but is instead an important point in contextualising the findings.

Opportunities for Further Research

This research was broad in scope, looking at participants' experiences of navigating their engagement with the CEE through their social relationships. Although their relationship to the natural world was mentioned by some participants, this could be more explicitly accessed in future research through incorporating questions related to emotionally resonant experiences in nature and

how these may have been shared within personal relationships. It could also be interesting to research the relational experiences of those who are less actively engaged with the CEE while someone in their life is more actively engaged. This could be done by accessing experiences of relational dyads to consider this from different perspectives.

It is important that future research considers how best to engage with a more ethnically diverse sample to access these vital perspectives. A possible solution could be participatory action research approaches. Participatory action research design was beyond the scope of this professional doctorate project. Participatory action research emphasises engaging with participants as co-researchers, and jointly developing and implementing research tailored towards empowerment and transformation (Kindon et al., 2007). However, a participatory action research approach focused on co-production of knowledge grounded within communities could fit well with climate justice research and could help access these perspectives. This could possibly involve a longitudinal project looking at embedded relational processes over time within a specific community.

A methodological paper is intended to be submitted for publication as a means of encouraging further use of sociograms as an elicitation tool for interviews within counselling psychology research. The use of sociograms in this way fits well with counselling psychology's relational focus. Using sociograms at an early point in the interviews encouraged reflection and dialogue about participants' relationships. This included considering the role of relationships in climate engagement, considering how relationship dynamics may have shifted following participants' climate engagement, and considering who may be absent from the sociograms and may not have come to mind when reflecting on climate engagement.

The role of therapist self-disclosure of climate engagement could be another area for future research. This could be considered in relation to clients' experiences of feeling their CEE engagement is understood. It is possible that in climate-aware therapy offering support to climate activists, there is already a degree of therapist self-disclosure by providing climate-focused support. However, in more general therapy contexts it is possible that therapist self-disclosure may be of more importance to clients feeling their CEE engagement is understood.

Conclusions

The CEE is arguably the most important issue facing our planet, with widespread effects already evident across the globe (IPCC, 2023). The magnitude of this issue means significant challenges remain regarding effective action to mitigate some of its associated harms. Certain challenges relate to existing power structures and vested interests upholding the status quo (Beder, 2014). Other challenges relate to intra and interpersonal relational processes, such as the strain participants experienced when managing their own emotional engagement with the CEE within their relationships while navigating internalised pressures of an idealised activist identity. Although less engaged loved ones at times offered a corrective to some of these internalised pressures, friends and family sometimes struggled to sit with participants' emotional pain. Participants found this could be an isolating experience. This study suggests that 'good enough' climate activism involves times of more active engagement as well as feeling supported to take breaks as needed, and to feel relationally nourished and validated through these different phases. There can be opportunities for increased depth and authenticity within existing relationships and within relationships formed through CEE engagement due to improved communication and vulnerability. Aided by using sociograms as an elicitation tool, this research has added to a growing relational perspective on climate engagement and suggests that there is a place for individual behaviour change embedded within relationships as this can shift social norms and practices. Experiences of hope through witnessing these changes within relationships can create a feedback loop and may further motivate individuals already engaging with the CEE. This study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, therefore further research is needed into these relational experiences. This could include accessing the perspectives of family and friends supporting people who are more emotionally engaged with the CEE. Counselling psychology can play a meaningful role through continuing to build more relational understandings of climate engagement.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Participant Information Sheet

Navigating emotional engagement with climate change through social relationships: A thematic analysis.

Participant Information Sheet

Who are the researchers and what is the research about?

Thank you for your interest in this research. My name is Sara Souissi and I am a trainee counselling psychologist in the Department of Health and Social Sciences, University of the West of England, Bristol. I am completing this research for my doctoral thesis. My research is supervised by Christine Ramsey-Wade (see below for her contact details).

The focus of this research is how your social relationships affect your engagement with the climate crisis, and how they have in turn been changed by your activism.

This research is important, as it aims to improve our understanding of the psychological aspects of one of the greatest threats facing humanity.

What does participation involve?

You are invited to participate in a qualitative interview. A qualitative interview is a 'conversation with a purpose'. You will be asked to answer a series of questions, in your own words. The questions will cover how you feel about climate change. There will be a discussion about your social relationships based on a completed sociogram. A sociogram is a diagram that shows connections between you and other people in your life. You may be asked to complete the sociogram before or during the interview, depending on whether the interview takes place face-to-face or remotely. There will also be questions about any actions that you take in response to the climate crisis.

The interview will be audio recorded and I will transcribe (type-up) the interview for the purposes of analysis. On the day of the interview, I will talk you through this information sheet again. I will also discuss with you what is going to happen in the interview, and you will be given an opportunity to ask any questions that you might have. I will then ask you to read and sign a consent form if you haven't already. You will be given another opportunity to ask questions at the end of the interview.

You will also be asked to complete a short demographic questionnaire. This is for me to gain a sense of who is taking part in the research.

Who can participate?

Anyone who is:

- Age 18 or over,
- English-speaking,
- Currently based in the UK,
- Does not have a court case pending related to their climate activism,
- And feels emotionally affected by climate change.

An ethical consideration of this project is that people may have been involved in non-violent civil disobedience as part of their climate activism. To avoid research data being requested by the courts, anyone who is currently involved in ongoing court proceedings will be unable to take part at this time.

How will the data be used?

Your interview data will be anonymised (i.e., any information that can identify you will be removed) and analysed for my research project. This means extracts from your interview may be quoted in my thesis and in any publications and presentations arising from the research. Sociogram data will be analysed along with the interview data, but the sociograms themselves will not be published in the thesis or any other materials. The demographic data for all the participants will be compiled into a table and included in my thesis and in any publications or presentations arising from the research. The information you provide will be treated confidentially and personally identifiable details will be stored separately from the data.

What are the benefits of taking part?

You will get the opportunity to participate in a research project on an important social and psychological issue. The findings of this research will have the potential to improve climate change responses and psychological support for people who are emotionally engaging with the climate and ecological emergency.

How do I withdraw from the research?

If you change your mind about taking part in this research, you can withdraw at any time, without explanation. If you decide you want to withdraw from the research, please contact me via email at sara2.souissi@live.uwe.ac.uk . Please note that there are certain points beyond which it will be impossible to withdraw from the research – for instance, when I have submitted my thesis. Therefore, if you wish to withdraw your data, you must inform me within one month of participation. Please

remember that participation in this research is voluntary, and all information provided will be anonymised.

Are there any risks involved?

We don't anticipate any risks to you in taking part in this research. However, there is always the potential for research participation to raise uncomfortable and distressing issues. For this reason, we have provided information about some of the different resources which are available to you. If you are a UWE student you can use the university counselling service, see: http://www1.uwe.ac.uk/students/healthandwellbeing/wellbeingservice.aspx or email wellbeing@uwe.ac.uk, or telephone 0117 3286268. If you are a member of staff at UWE, the Employee Assistance Programme offers staff access to a free confidential telephone helpline service. If you are not a student at UWE or you would prefer an off-campus counselling service, the following website lists free or low cost counselling services in the local area: http://www.bristolmind.org.uk/bsn/counselling. The Climate Psychology Alliance also offers therapeutic support to people affected by the climate crisis https://www.climatepsychologyalliance.org/therapy/388-findsupport.

If you have any questions about this research, please contact my research supervisor: Christine Ramsey-Wade, Department of Health and Social Sciences, Frenchay Campus, Coldharbour Lane, Bristol BS16 1QY

Email: <christine.ramsey-wade@uwe.ac.uk >

This research has been approved by the Faculty Research Ethics Committee (FREC)

Appendix B: UWE Privacy Notice

UWE Privacy Notice

Purpose of the Privacy Notice

This privacy notice explains how the University of the West of England, Bristol (UWE) collects, manages and uses your personal data before, during and after you participate in this research on your relational experiences of emotional engagement with the climate crisis. 'Personal data' means any information relating to an identified or identifiable natural person (the data subject). An 'identifiable natural person' is one who can be identified, directly or indirectly, including by reference to an identifier such as a name, an identification number, location data, an online identifier, or to one or more factors specific to the physical, physiological, genetic, mental, economic, cultural or social identity of that natural person.

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

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

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

Why are we processing your personal data?

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

How do we use your personal data?

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

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

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

Our research is governed by robust policies and procedures and, where human participants are involved, is subject to ethical approval from either UWE Bristol's Faculty or University Research Ethics Committees. This research has been approved by the Faculty Research Ethics Committee (FREC) at UWE. The committee's email address should you wish to contact them is: researchethics@uwe.ac.uk. The ethics application reference number is: HAS.20.08.012. 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 C: Consent Form

Navigating emotional engagement with climate change through social relationships: A thematic analysis.

Consent Form

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this research on your social relationships and your engagement with the climate crisis.

My name is Sara Souissi, and I am a trainee counselling psychologist in the Department of Health and Social Sciences, University of the West of England, Bristol. I am completing this research for my doctoral thesis. My research is supervised by Christine Ramsey-Wade. She can be contacted at the Department of Health and Social Sciences, University of the West of England, Frenchay Campus, Coldharbour Lane, Bristol BS16 1QY [Tel: (0117) 3281234; Email: christine.ramsey-wade@uwe.ac.uk] if you have any queries about the research.

Before we begin, I would like to emphasise that:

- your participation is entirely voluntary

- you are free to refuse to answer any question or to decline to complete the sociogram

- you are free to withdraw at any time up to one month after your interview

You are also the 'expert'. There are no right or wrong answers and I am interested in everything you have to say.

Please sign this form to show that you have read the contents of this form, the participant information sheet and privacy notice and you consent to participate in the research:

_____ (Signed)

_____ (Printed)

_____ (Date)

Please return the signed copy of this form to me and retain a copy for yourself.

The personal information collected in this research project (e.g., on any form/questionnaire/survey) will be processed by the University in accordance with the terms and conditions of the 1998 Data Protection Act. We will hold your data securely and not make it available to any third party unless permitted or required to do so by law. Your personal information will be used/processed as described on the participant information sheet.

This research has been approved by the Faculty Research Ethics Committee (FREC)

Appendix D: Risk Assessment Form and Health and Safety Arrangements

University of the West of England BRISTOL

GENERAL RISK ASSESSMENT FORM

Ref:

Describe the activity being assessed:	Assessed by:	Endorsed by:
Sara Souissi DCouns Psych project: Conducting telephone, video-call or face-to-face interviews about experiences related to the climate crisis	Christine Ramsey-Wade	Miles Thompson
Who might be harmed: Researcher and/or participants	**Date of Assessment:**	**Review date(s):**
How many exposed to risk: 11-21		

Hazards Identified *(state the potential harm)*	Existing Control Measures	S	L	Risk Level	Additional Control Measures	S	L	Risk Level	By whom and by when	Date completed
Participant distress. There is a risk that some participants may become more anxioius or distressed by discussing the climate and ecological emergency.	Participants will be informed of this potential risk through the information sheet. I will use all of my skills as a trainee counselling psychologist to monitor and support participants during interviews.	2	2	4	I will acknowledge participants' distress and offer to pause the interview if needed (Braun & Clarke, 2013). I will provide information about available support services to all participants in case they require support following the interview.	2	1	2	PGR	
Researcher distress. It is possible that the interviews may bring up distressing topics or topics close to my own experience.	I will use a reflexive diary throughout to capture and contain my emotional experiences.	2	2	4	I will seek support from my supervision team and from personal therapy as appropriate.	2	1	2	PGR	
Covid-19. All non-essential contact should be avoided, to assist in national efforts to contain the spread of the virus.	Telephone or video-call interviews only. Should things change, face-to-face interviews will be considered.	3	2	6	All Health and Safety requrements regarding Covid-19 will be adhered to in full, should any face-to-face interviews take place in the future.	3	1	3	PGR	
Lone working. Lone working is a consideration if conducting face-to-face interviews.	I will comply throughout any face-to-face interiews with UWE's Lone Working Policy.	2	2	4	I will conduct face-to-face interviews at UWE and ensure that I contact someone at the start and end of my interview.	2	1	2	PGR	

RISK MATRIX: (To generate the risk level).

Very likely 5	5	10	15	20	25
Likely 4	4	8	12	16	20
Possible 3	3	6	9	12	15
Unlikely 2	2	4	6	8	10
Extremely unlikely 1	1	2	3	4	5
Likelihood (L) ↑ / Severity (S) →	**Minor injury – No first aid treatment required 1**	**Minor injury – Requires First Aid Treatment 2**	**Injury - requires GP treatment or Hospital attendance 3**	**Major Injury 4**	**Fatality 5**

ACTION LEVEL: (To identify what action needs to be taken).

POINTS:	RISK LEVEL:	ACTION:
1 – 2	NEGLIGIBLE	No further action is necessary.
3 – 5	TOLERABLE	Where possible, reduce the risk further
6 - 12	MODERATE	Additional control measures are required
15 – 16	HIGH	Immediate action is necessary
20 - 25	INTOLERABLE	Stop the activity/ do not start the activity

Appendix E: Interview Guide

1. **I'd like to know more about when you first started to become aware of the climate crisis.** Was there something going on at the time that influenced this?
2. **Do you talk to anyone about your feelings about the climate crisis?** Are there certain situations where it feels easier/more difficult to talk about it? What helps it to feel easier? What makes it feel more difficult?
3. *(If face-to-face or video conferencing)* **– I would be grateful if you could complete a sociogram. A sociogram is a diagram showing our relationships with other people. These can be relationships that feel close or distant. You can show the type of relationship by using different lines, colours, or positions on the paper for example. Here is a suggestion of how you might want to illustrate these relationships on the sheet of paper.** *(If over telephone)* **– Thank you for taking the time to complete your sociogram.**
4. **Can you talk me through what you first notice when you look at your sociogram?** How did you feel completing that? Who did you place close to you? Are there any relationships on there that you weren't sure about? I notice that your relationship with x seems distant/close/there might be some tension. Can you tell me a bit more about that?
5. **Have any of these relationships changed since you started to become more emotionally engaged with the climate crisis?** In what ways have they changed? Are there things that you feel have contributed to the relationship becoming closer/more distant/more difficult? Are there any social occasions when discussions about climate are off limits? What is it like for you during certain social events or festivals?
6. **What do you think they would say about why the relationship has changed?**
7. **Is there anyone that you haven't put on your sociogram?** And that you would never talk to about the climate crisis? Why do you think that is? How do you feel about not putting them on there?
8. **Is there anything else that you would like to say about your sociogram?**
9. **Are there actions that you take in response to the climate crisis?** Can you tell me a bit more about why you do some of these things? How do you feel about taking these actions? Do you feel there are things that get in the way of you being able to act?
10. **Do you think your relationships play a role in how you respond to the climate emergency?** In what way? Have they got in the way of your activism, supported it, or neither/a bit of both?

11. **Have these actions had any impact on your relationships? (New or existing?)** Can you tell me a bit more about how your relationships were affected? Have they been changed at all by your activism? If so, how?

12. **Is there anything else that you would like to add or ask?**

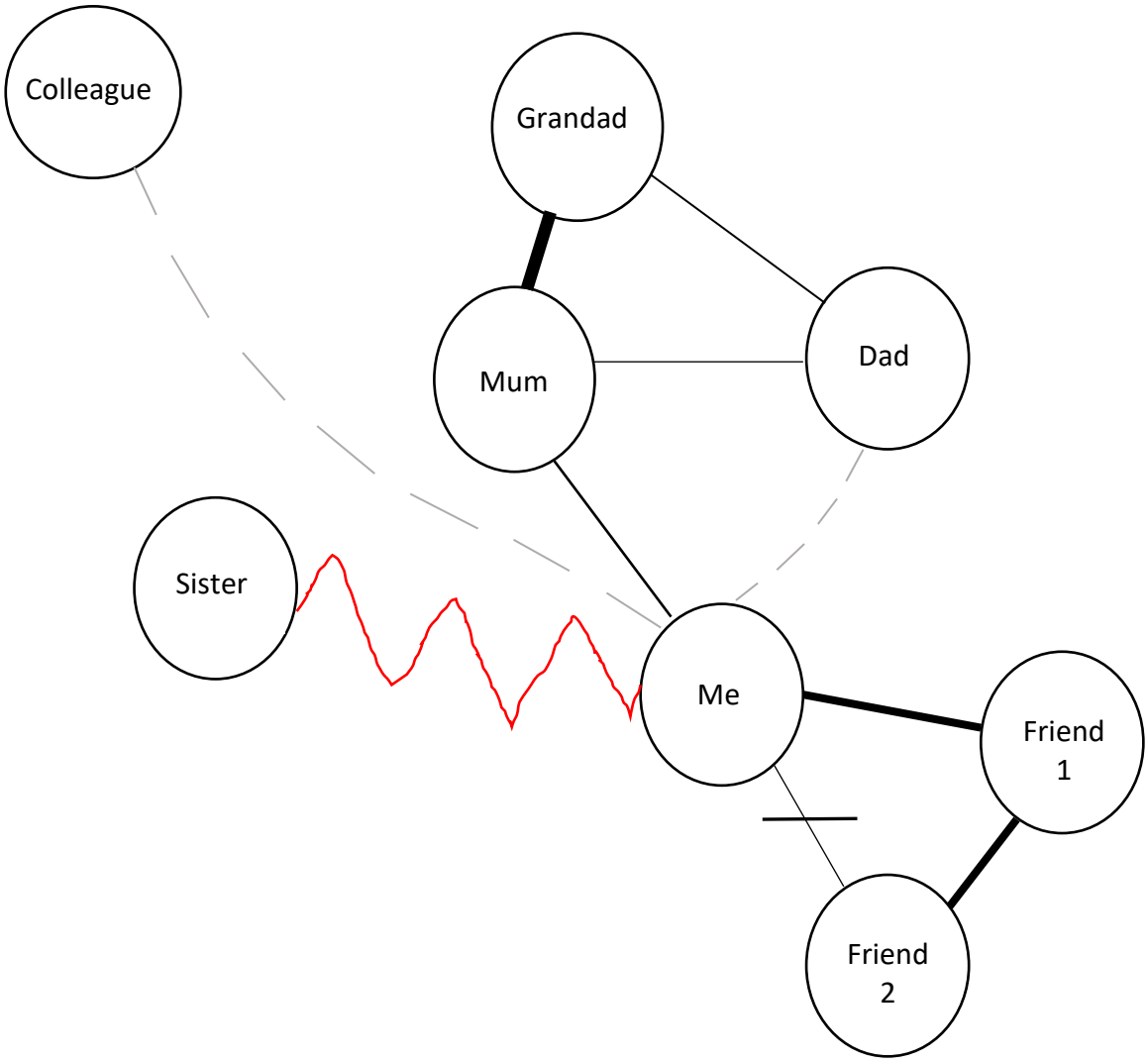
Appendix F: Sociogram Information and Guidance

Sociogram Information and Guidance

A sociogram is a diagram that shows connections between you and other people in your life. Here is an example of a sociogram and some suggestions about how you can show different kinds of connections.

You might want to show closer relationships by who you draw close to you on the sociogram. You could also use thicker lines to show a closer connection. You might want to use wavy or jagged lines for relationships where there is conflict. You can choose to use colour to show something meaningful to you about different relationships. You can draw a line through a connection if a relationship has ended with that person. You might want to show more distant relationships with a dashed line.

There is no right or wrong way to draw the sociogram, its main purpose is to aid discussion during the interview.



Appendix G: Demographics Form

Demographics Form

Navigating emotional engagement with climate change through social relationships: A thematic analysis.

Some questions about you

For us to learn about the range of people taking part in this research, we would be grateful if you could answer the following questions. All information provided is anonymous.

Please either write your answer in the space provided, or circle the answer, or answers, that best apply to you.

1	How old are you?			
2	I am:	Male	Female	Other
3	I am:	Full-time employed	Part-time employed	Full-time student
		Part-time student	Other: _____	
3a	If you work, what is your occupation?			
4	How would you describe your sexuality?	Heterosexual Bisexual Lesbian Gay Other: _____		
5	How would you describe your racial/ethnic background? (e.g., White; Black; White Jewish; Asian Muslim)	_____		
6	How would you describe your social class? (e.g., working class; middle class; no class category)	_____		
7	Do you consider yourself to be disabled?	Yes	No	

8	How would you describe your relationship status?	Single Partnered Married/Civil Partnership Separated Divorced/Civil Partnership Dissolved Other: _____	
9	Do you have children?	Yes	No
10	Would you describe yourself as an activist?	Yes	No

Thank you!

The personal information collected in this research project (e.g., on any form/questionnaire/survey) will be processed by the University in accordance with the terms and conditions of the 1998 Data Protection Act. We will hold your data securely and not make it available to any third party unless permitted or required to do so by law. Your personal information will be used/processed as described on the participant information sheet.

This research has been approved by the Faculty Research Ethics Committee (FREC)

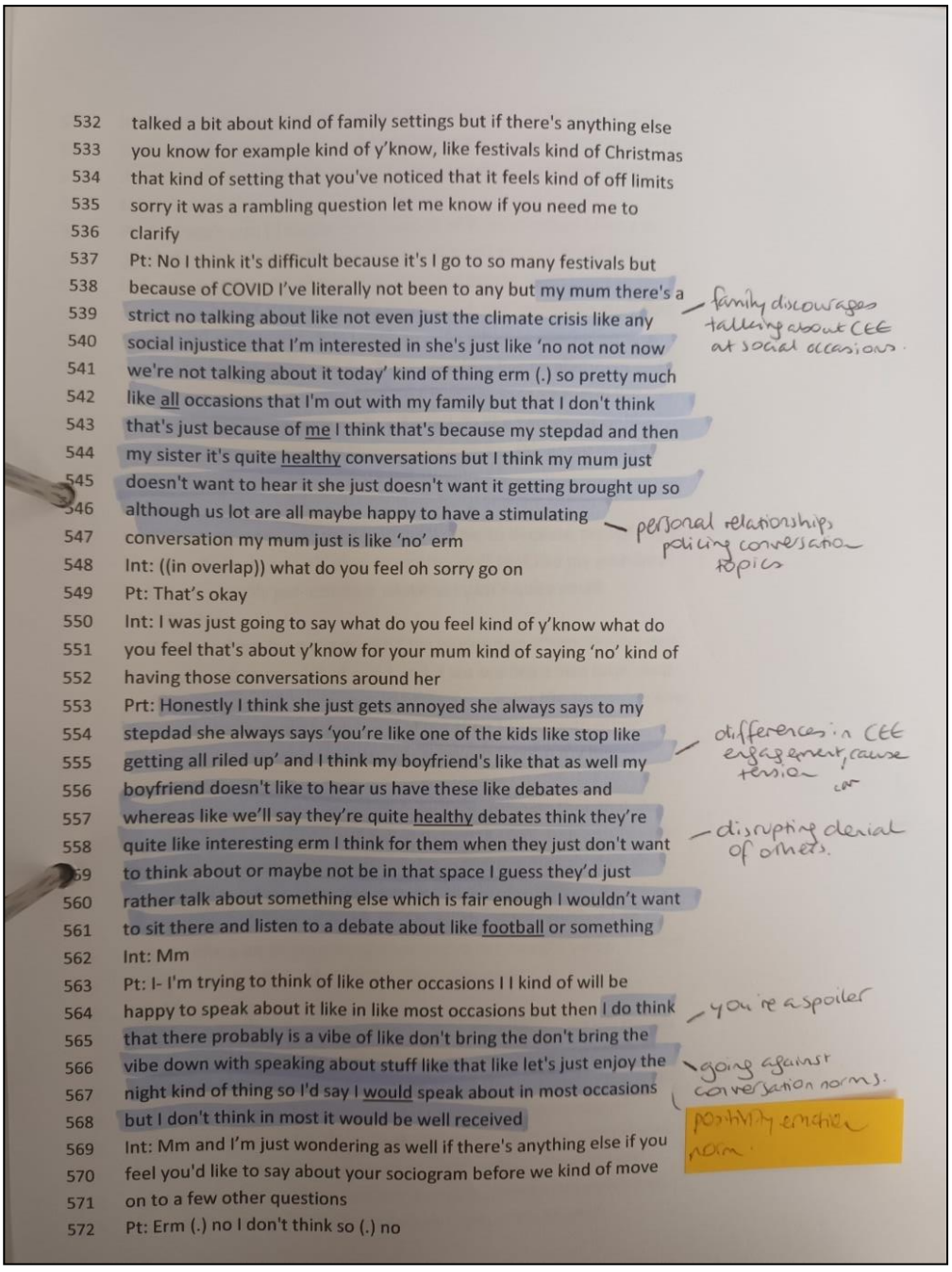
Appendix H*:* Ethical Approval Granted

Removed as this contains personal information.

Appendix I: Braun and Clarke's (2013) Orthographic Transcription Notation System (Adapted From Jefferson, 2004)

Feature	Notation
Laughing, coughing, sighing etc.	((laughs)) ((coughs)) ((sighs))
Pausing	((pause)) signals a significant pause of a few seconds or more (.) signals a shorter pause
Overlapping speech	((in overlap))
Cut-off speech and speech sounds	-
Emphasis on particular words	<u>word</u>
Reported speech	'speech'
Removing irrelevant text/interviewer speech	[…]

Appendix J: Evidence of Initial Coding



talked a bit about kind of family settings but if there's anything else
you know for example kind of y'know, like festivals kind of Christmas
that kind of setting that you've noticed that it feels kind of off limits
sorry it was a rambling question let me know if you need me to
clarify
Pt: No I think it's difficult because it's I go to so many festivals but
because of COVID I've literally not been to any but my mum there's a
strict no talking about like not even just the climate crisis like any
social injustice that I'm interested in she's just like 'no not not now
we're not talking about it today' kind of thing erm (.) so pretty much
like all occasions that I'm out with my family but that I don't think
that's just because of me I think that's because my stepdad and then
my sister it's quite healthy conversations but I think my mum just
doesn't want to hear it she just doesn't want it getting brought up so
although us lot are all maybe happy to have a stimulating
conversation my mum just is like 'no' erm
Int: ((in overlap)) what do you feel oh sorry go on
Pt: That's okay
Int: I was just going to say what do you feel kind of y'know what do
you feel that's about y'know for your mum kind of saying 'no' kind of
having those conversations around her
Prt: Honestly I think she just gets annoyed she always says to my
stepdad she always says 'you're like one of the kids like stop like
getting all riled up' and I think my boyfriend's like that as well my
boyfriend doesn't like to hear us have these like debates and
whereas like we'll say they're quite healthy debates think they're
quite like interesting erm I think for them when they just don't want
to think about or maybe not be in that space I guess they'd just
rather talk about something else which is fair enough I wouldn't want
to sit there and listen to a debate about like football or something
Int: Mm
Pt: I- I'm trying to think of like other occasions I I kind of will be
happy to speak about it like in like most occasions but then I do think
that there probably is a vibe of like don't bring the don't bring the
vibe down with speaking about stuff like that like let's just enjoy the
night kind of thing so I'd say I would speak about in most occasions
but I don't think in most it would be well received
Int: Mm and I'm just wondering as well if there's anything else if you
feel you'd like to say about your sociogram before we kind of move
on to a few other questions
Pt: Erm (.) no I don't think so (.) no

family discourages talking about CEE at social occasions.

personal relationships policing conversation topics

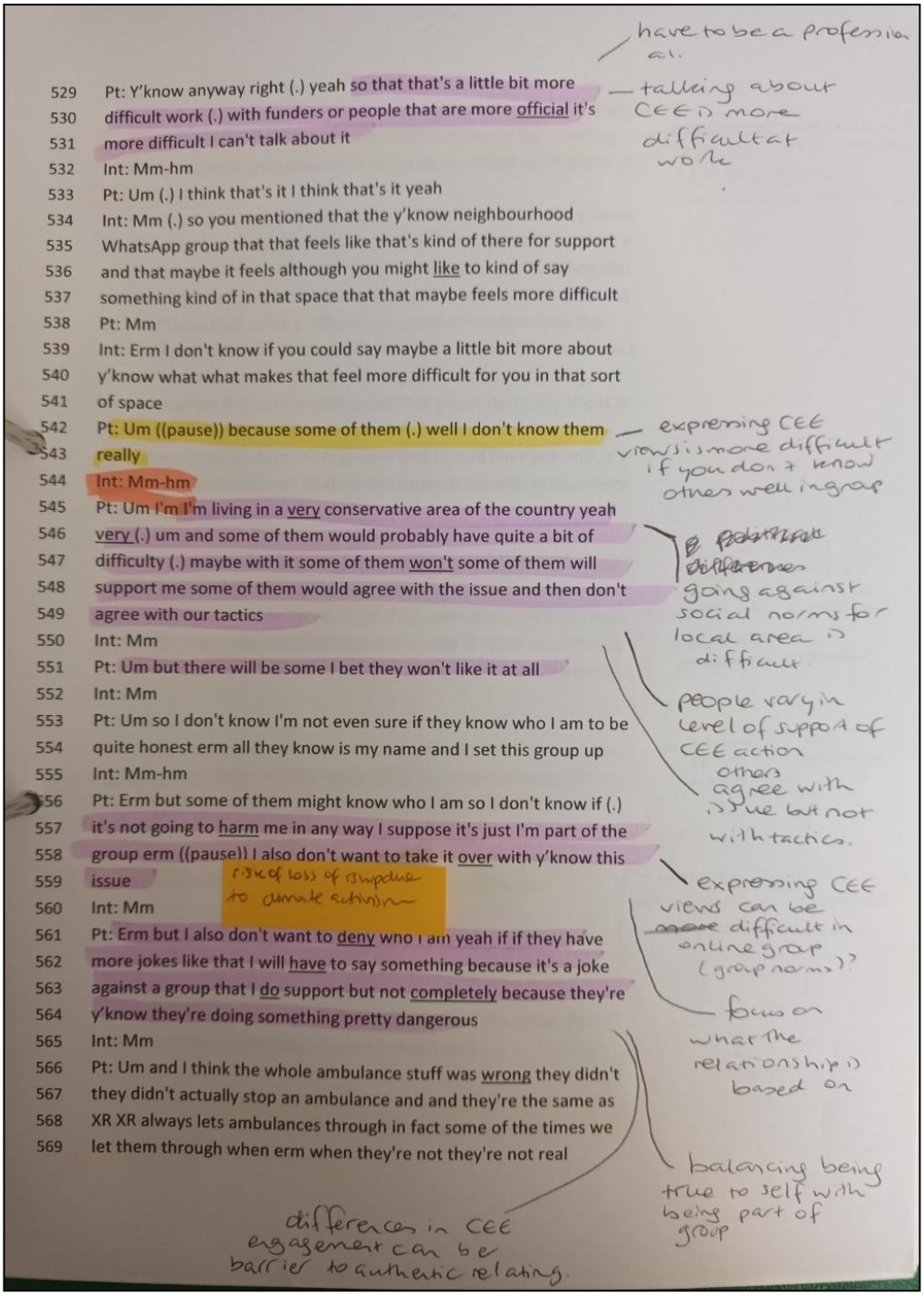
differences in CEE engagement, cause tension

disrupting denial of others.

you're a spoiler

going against conversation norms.

positivity emphasis norm.



Pt: Y'know anyway right (.) yeah so that that's a little bit more
difficult work (.) with funders or people that are more official it's
more difficult I can't talk about it
Int: Mm-hm
Pt: Um (.) I think that's it I think that's it yeah
Int: Mm (.) so you mentioned that the y'know neighbourhood
WhatsApp group that that feels like that's kind of there for support
and that maybe it feels although you might like to kind of say
something kind of in that space that that maybe feels more difficult
Pt: Mm
Int: Erm I don't know if you could say maybe a little bit more about
y'know what what makes that feel more difficult for you in that sort
of space
Pt: Um ((pause)) because some of them (.) well I don't know them
really
Int: Mm-hm
Pt: Um I'm I'm living in a very conservative area of the country yeah
very (.) um and some of them would probably have quite a bit of
difficulty (.) maybe with it some of them won't some of them will
support me some of them would agree with the issue and then don't
agree with our tactics
Int: Mm
Pt: Um but there will be some I bet they won't like it at all
Int: Mm
Pt: Um so I don't know I'm not even sure if they know who I am to be
quite honest erm all they know is my name and I set this group up
Int: Mm-hm
Pt: Erm but some of them might know who I am so I don't know if (.)
it's not going to harm me in any way I suppose it's just I'm part of the
group erm ((pause)) I also don't want to take it over with y'know this
issue
Int: Mm
Pt: Erm but I also don't want to deny who I am yeah if if they have
more jokes like that I will have to say something because it's a joke
against a group that I do support but not completely because they're
y'know they're doing something pretty dangerous
Int: Mm
Pt: Um and I think the whole ambulance stuff was wrong they didn't
they didn't actually stop an ambulance and and they're the same as
XR XR always lets ambulances through in fact some of the times we
let them through when erm when they're not they're not real

have to be a professional.

talking about CEE is more difficult at work

expressing CEE views is more difficult if you don't know others well in group

going against social norms for local area is difficult

people vary in level of support of CEE action others agree with issue but not with tactics.

risk of loss of impetus to climate action

expressing CEE views can be more difficult in online group (group norms)?

focus on what the relationship is based on

balancing being true to self with being part of group

differences in CEE engagement can be barrier to authentic relating.

Appendix K: Evidence of Code Tracking and Refinement Process (Excerpts from Excel Spreadsheet)

Code	Extracts (transcript #, line #)	Similar codes	Revised code (if applicable)
learnt about it at school	\ I'm sure I was taught this at school like I guess it's the greenhouse effect I don't know if I was actually taught about climate change (**1,17**) \ I remember I was at primary school and we did erm a play about erm the cutting down of the rainforest (**2,13**) we learned about it quite early in secondary school (**3,10**) \ I mean it must have been (.) in school (.) not described as the climate crisis but as global warming (**4,11**) \ even way back when I was in school doing my A levels I was studying environmental science at that time erm so I suppose y'know all the way back from through school that there's been I've had a developing awareness of climate related issues (**11,16**) \ They have a farm at the school there's wind turbines they're generating their energy erm they have pigs and chickens so y'know so lots of good stuff like that and that's quite nice because I feel like we can each the school and home are supplementing the kind of stuff they're getting Int: Mm Pt: So it's not just they're getting a lone voice do y'know what I mean it's not an influence that's just coming from one place (**11,846**)		deleted as less relevant to research qs
longterm engagement with CEE	/ yeah it's a really long time ago ((laughs)) **(1,22)** / the only ones that pre-exist my emotional engagement with the climate crisis are (.) my parents my brother and [friend 2] the rest wer- because as I say I- I've been emotionally engaged in the climate crisis for twenty years **(1,533)** / So I actually got quite it goes back quite a long my concern is very deep and erm (.) so yeah that's where so I mean and I've been obviously aware of just the growing failure of our government y'know successive COP conferences and y'know not not mentioning climate change in policies for y'know decades **(9,23)** / I started to be involved in transition erm I may have known about it before but that's when I really became very aware and very worried about it **(12,15)**		

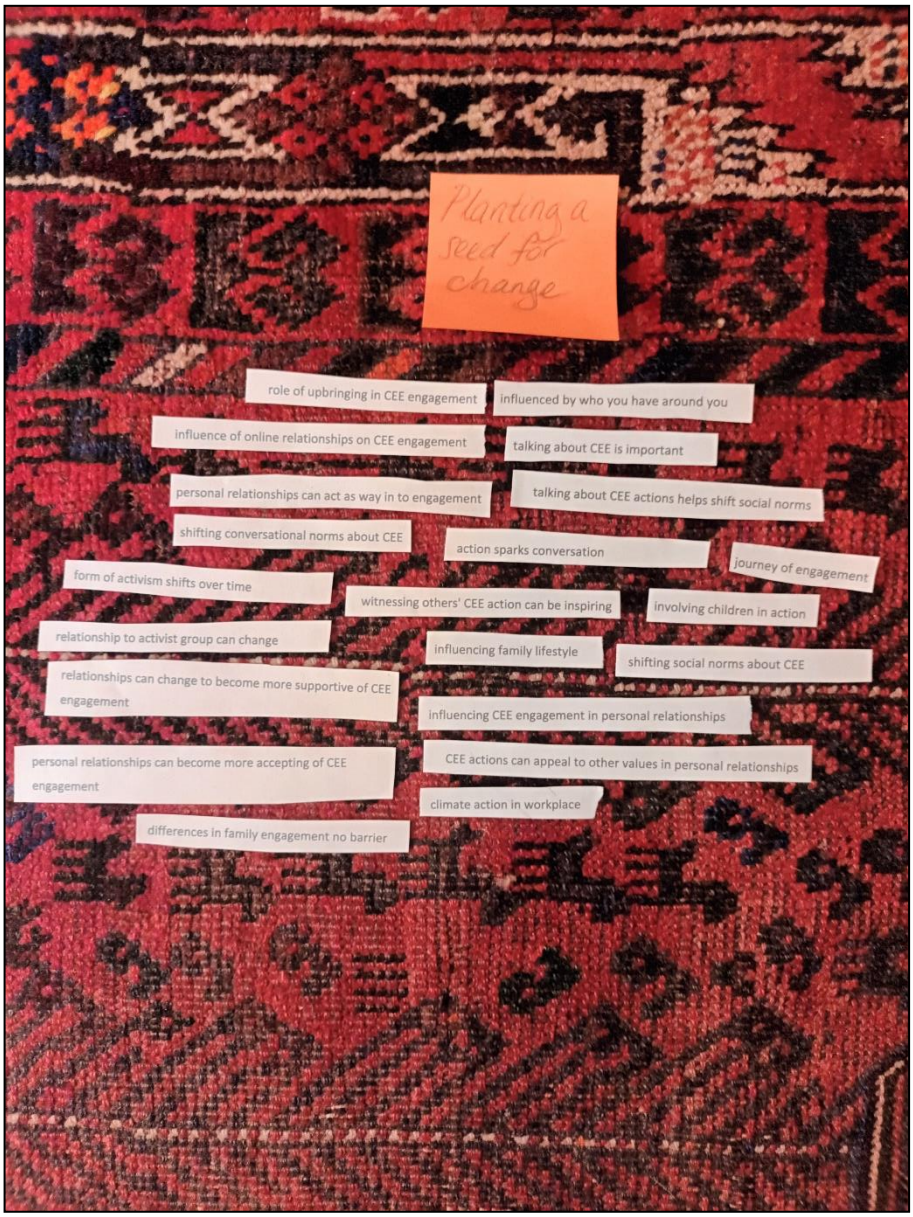
	[illegible]		
overlaps in protest movements	/ I started hanging out with erm people who had kind of come off the end of the road protest movement **(1,34)** / I met people who were road protesters the road protests had kind of finished by that point erm they were yeah it was on kind it was a lot of anti genetics campaigning around at the time but also (.) climate campaigning **(1,63)** / I've been an activist for a long long time I was involved in the peace movement around [area in UK] **(12,34)** / this one person erm that I'd re-met who was who I was involved with in the peace movement days and I re-met at the first action I went to for XR in [UK city] and I stayed with them in fact which was really sort of quite weird er and er quite and I've I've met two two people that I knew three people that I knew from that time **(12,588)**		longterm engagement with CEE
influenced by who you have around you	/ I started hanging out with erm people who had kind of come off the end of the road protest movement **(1,34)** / so when I moved into this house which there was lots of activists and actually they were all away at ((pause)) erm a COP something or other **(1,66)** / yeah so I guess (.) if I wasn't aware then I would have become aware then **(1,74)** / in a way she was always very political and we had a kind of emotional friendship that wasn't based on politics but then I gradually having left university couple years after university just kind of started to actually get into the stuff that she was doing **(1,542)** / the activism around doing climate change in my twenties like doing activism with people like [friend 2] Int: Mm-hm Pt: Made me incredibly close to them and y'know kind of trusting people with your lives just takes your friendships to entirely different levels **(1,548)** / which has been hard then with m- my little kids cos then they're erm y'know they're obviously heavily influenced by their older [siblings] **(1,950)** / y'know I think we've moved on beyond climate ((laughs)) deniers but erm so I think it would be a light it's a ripple I mean none of us are islands are we so it affect- we're affected by one of the herd is what 'why why why are they y'know why are they standing on their heads screaming' y'know they they notice y'know **(5,738)** / so yeah the [Christian related science group] is I'd say probably the closest strongest influence on me in terms of		

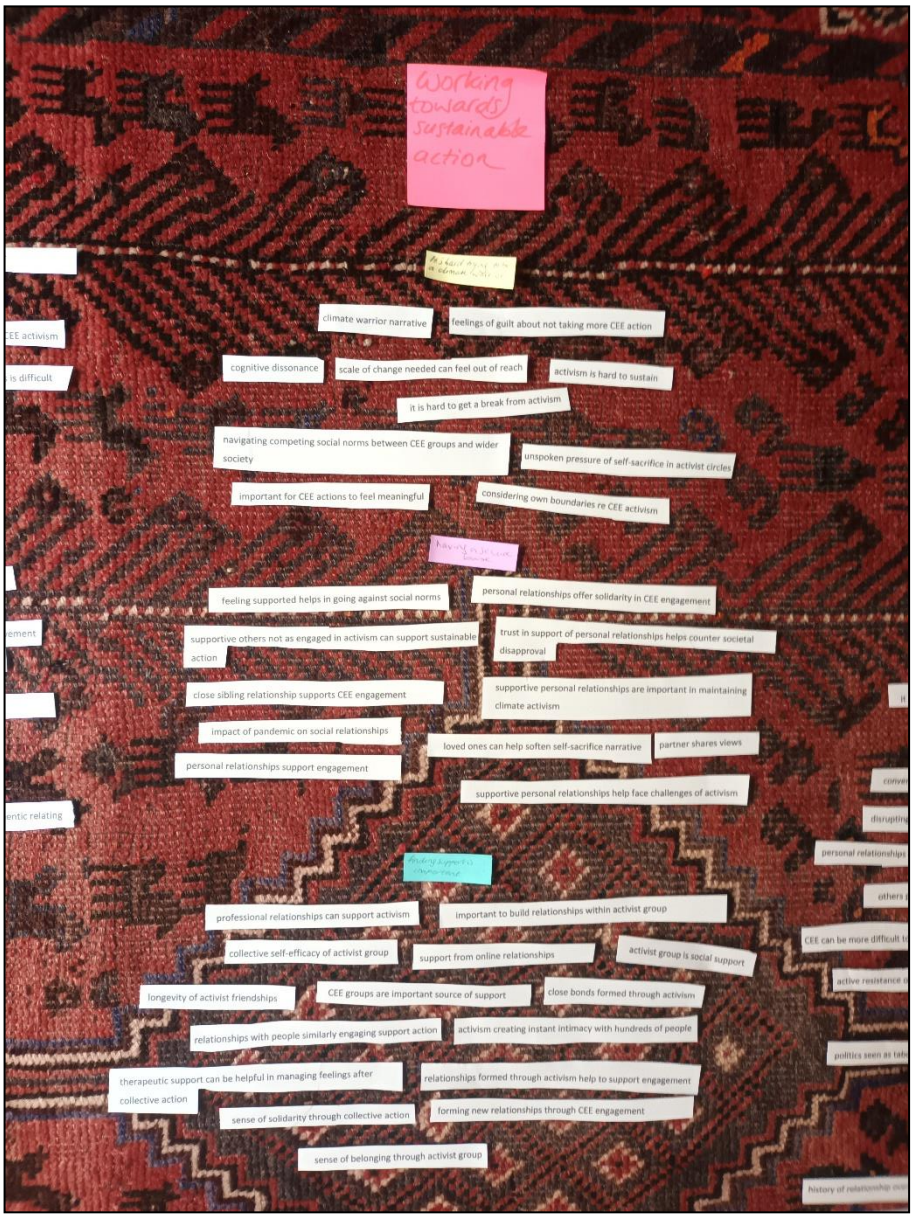
activism is hard to sustain	/ I went through the whole stage of being quite intensely doing climate activism **(1,85)** / so yeah that kind of time was all very much in my in the forefront of my mind **(1,102)** / Erm (.) and I (.) kind of took a bit of a (.) step back **(1,112)** / And it's all gonna be fine and I erm stuck my head back in the sand erm and stopped doing activism basically (.) erm **(1,131)** / like I've got a whole load of I- I want to get back into doing climate activism actually **(1,146)** / I felt like I had kind of gone as far as I could with it and I just wanted to try something else and something a bit less (.) kind of hard I guess **(1,205)** / so I moved to [current UK city] with the full intention of (.) kind of (.) getting back involved in some way but I just haven't erm and (.) it's hard to tell exactly why **(1,221)** / so she's a friend of mine (.) erm from before (.) when I was an activist **(1,427)** / So yeah so the dog challenges so when I had a dog previously I erm that was when I was an activist I fed my dog vegan food **(1,876)** / it's not like I'm totally awful and y'know I I probably y'know compared to a normal person well not a normal person compared to an average person I'm erm I'm probably a lot more environmentally erm green Int: Mm-hm Pt: But compared to how I used to be **(1,895)** / Erm I guess I kind of gave up in a way I kind of gave up and thought I just 'okay If you can't y'know can't beat 'em join 'em' kind of thing ((laughs)) **(1,913)** /		
pull towards denial	/ I have continued to be aware of climate change I guess I kind of I took a step back from doing frontline kind of direct action stuff (.) and (.) I guess I tried to put it in a box **(1,120)** / and hope that I was wrong that I hope that I'd been wrong y'know we'd been kind of y'know at a time when there was lots of kind of climate denial going around **(1,124)** / well y'know let's just all kind of hope that they were right **(1,129)** / And it's all gonna be fine and I erm stuck my head back in the sand erm and stopped doing activism basically (.) erm **(1,131)** / I dunno I think when I think I connected a lot more to it when I was in my twenties but it's still there it's still there it's just y'know pushed awa- away in a box erm ((yawns)) and that's probably why y'know (.) what enables me to be living my lifestyle I am now erm (.) erm ((pause)) **(1,1025)** / Something was afoot for a few years before but not quite sure (.) not quite getting the whole (.) still think thinking myself y'know fifteen twenty years ago thinking when it was probably still was the first bits of y'know of general population aware of it and thinking 'they- they'll yeah but they'll find a solution surely that y'know there something will be found we- we'll find a way out of this' y'know (.) yeah **(5,62)** / And it spoi- it's a kind of spoiler 'cos things you can pretend it's alright and it is sort of alright but it's a spoiler you're a spoiler y'know if you bring up this 'what the end of the world yeah yeah yeah actually yeah it looks like probably is yeah' /	socially organised denial	
	/ I've had a whole load of books to read and I found some		

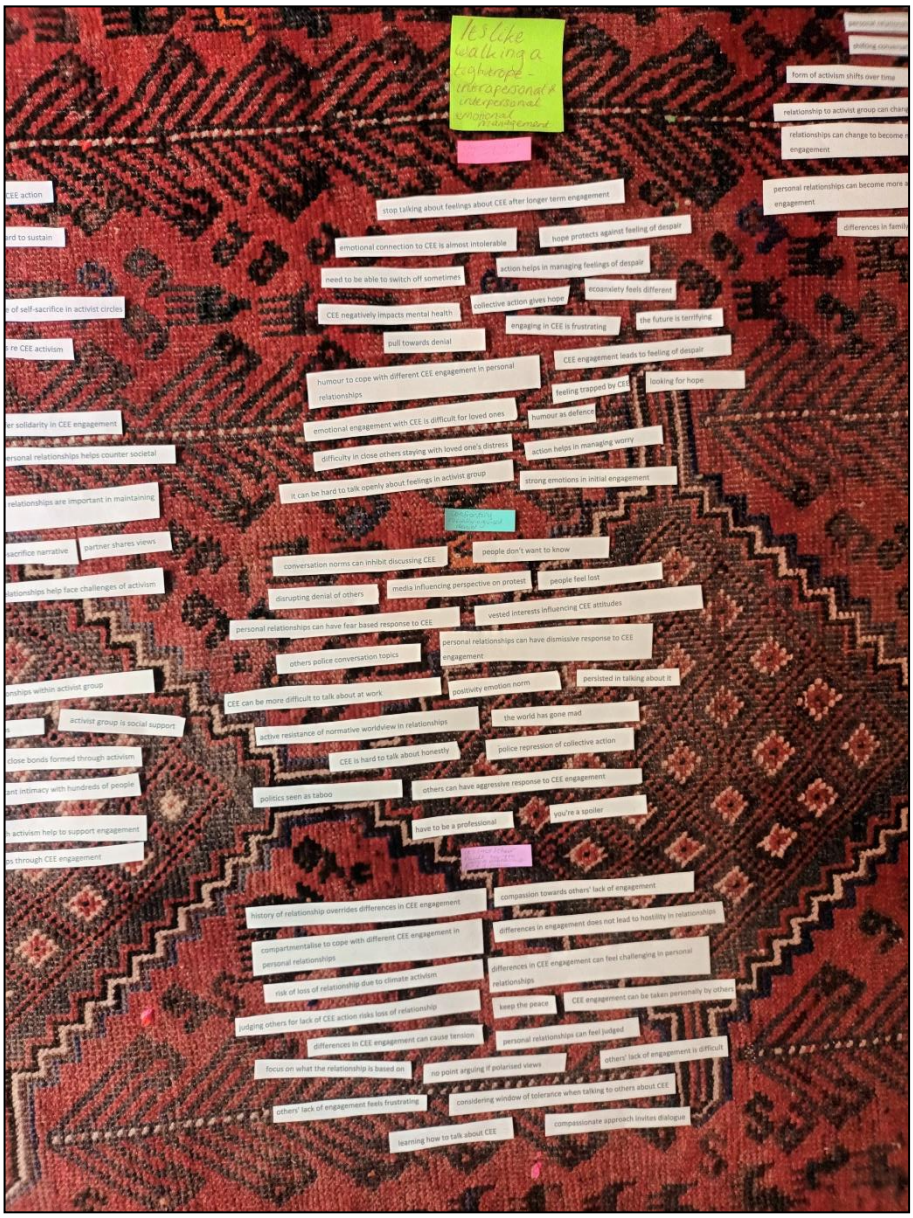
looking for hope	/ I've got a whole load of books to read and I found some more kind of I guess more hopeful stuff to cling to ((laughs)) **(1,150)** / y'know a kind of like a so- societal collapse essentially but would be awful and y'know I chose to have children **(1,159)** / but y'know despite all this I guess I- I'm just trying to be hopeful erm and yeah I've kind of I've been reading stuff about human response to disaster and actually it's really positive **(1,163)** / I think it's affected everything a little bit a little bit Int: Mm Pt: Yeah and some some of that for the for the good ((laughs)) **(5,685)** / I suppose maybe it's my Christian faith that makes me think that there is always going to be hope people will start to listen people will start to see the sense of it **(6,929)** / I think things are happening y'know there's a lot more on LinkedIn now about climate I think people are gradually getting it **(6,954)** / But we have we've it's a lot of positivity as well because we have now we've put a pond in and we've got hedgehogs and y'know foxes Int: Mm Pt: And mice possibly slightly too close to the house but erm (.) it's there's been lots of ups and downs but it's all very small scale and then you see in the wider scale that things still seem to be going very negatively and it does get a bit does get bit depressing if you think if you dwell on it Int: Mm Pt: I think I just have to keep rolling ((laughs)) **(7,348)**		
immediate needs of children can be barrier to CEE engagement	/ I want to get back into stuff at the moment I'm swamped in home schooling and (children) and stuff but I- I want to get back to doing community organising **(1,173)** / alright okay so other relationships that stop me from doing climate activism is my kids I guess **(1,765)** / I can kind of do that stuff a bit more as my kids get older but certainly at the moment and certainly in lockdown I'm I have now very little time to do anything else apart from look after my kids so I guess at the moment they're stopping me erm (.) but maybe once y'know they're both at school and life returns to normal a bit erm (.) **(1,773)** / But I'm I'm sort of I'm in a bit of a period of stasis at the moment with my kids kind of thing like right now I'm jus- just doing kids at the minute erm **(1,924)** / I had young children for quite long time sort of my youngest is [six] so I think it's probably as they came out of the toddler years and I started to have some time to actually think ((laughs)) in my personal life that was the point where I started to take an interest in other things (.) and erm (.) yeah probably at that point started to take more notice of it **(7,38)**		

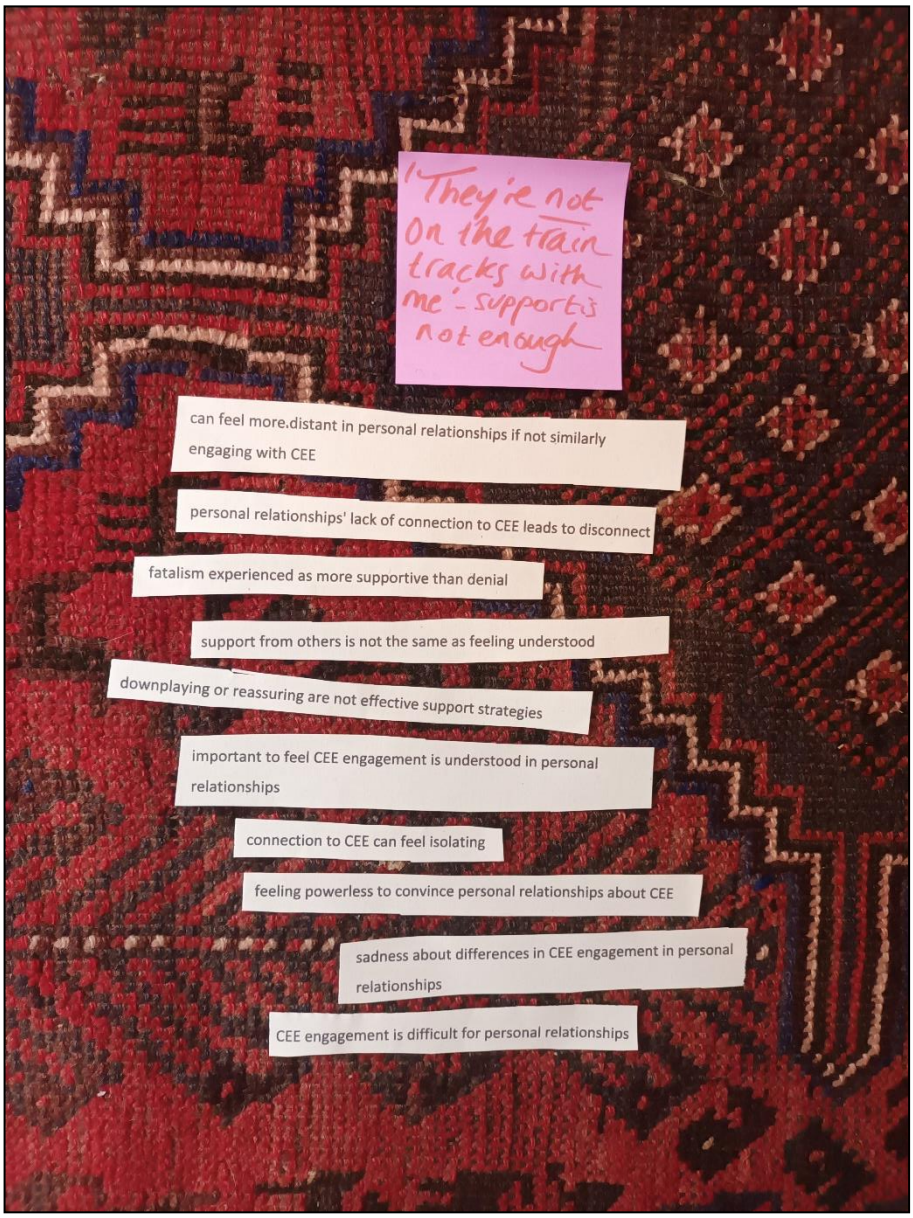
engaging in CEE is frustrating	/ so it happened at a time where I'd kind of chosen to (.) take a step back erm because of I guess largely because of the repression it felt like I was banging my head against a brick wall **(1,201)** / we do a lot of litter picks and that sort of thing Int: Mm Pt: Which feels like you're doing something positive but then you walk back down that road the next day and it's exactly the same so it's (.) it does become a bit of a negative thing y'know it doesn't necessarily make you feel better it makes you feel like you're pushing against the rest of the world in a certain to a certain extent **(7,115)** / Or have wildflower verges wildflowers and orchards and they're very sort of erm 'oh well that might y'know spoil the view for the drivers' and that sort of thing and it does feel like you're hitting your head against a brick wall a lot **(7,326)**	frustrating when personal relationships aren't similarly engaging with CEE differences in CEE engagement are frustrating differences in CEE engagement in personal relationships can feel frustrating witnessing climate unfriendly behaviours in others is frustrating lack of CEE engagement in personal relationships is frustrating	
choice to have children is fraught	/ y'know a kind of like a so- societal collapse essentially but would be awful and y'know I chose to have children **(1,159)** / But that aside and we were afraid to have children and actually if you've never had children and even that's quite a big conversation in any case Int: Mm Pt: Because y'know AOC in America I mean they gave a really powerful speech deciding not to have children or and had tears in her eyes **(5,176)**	children as hopeful act	concern for future generations motivating action

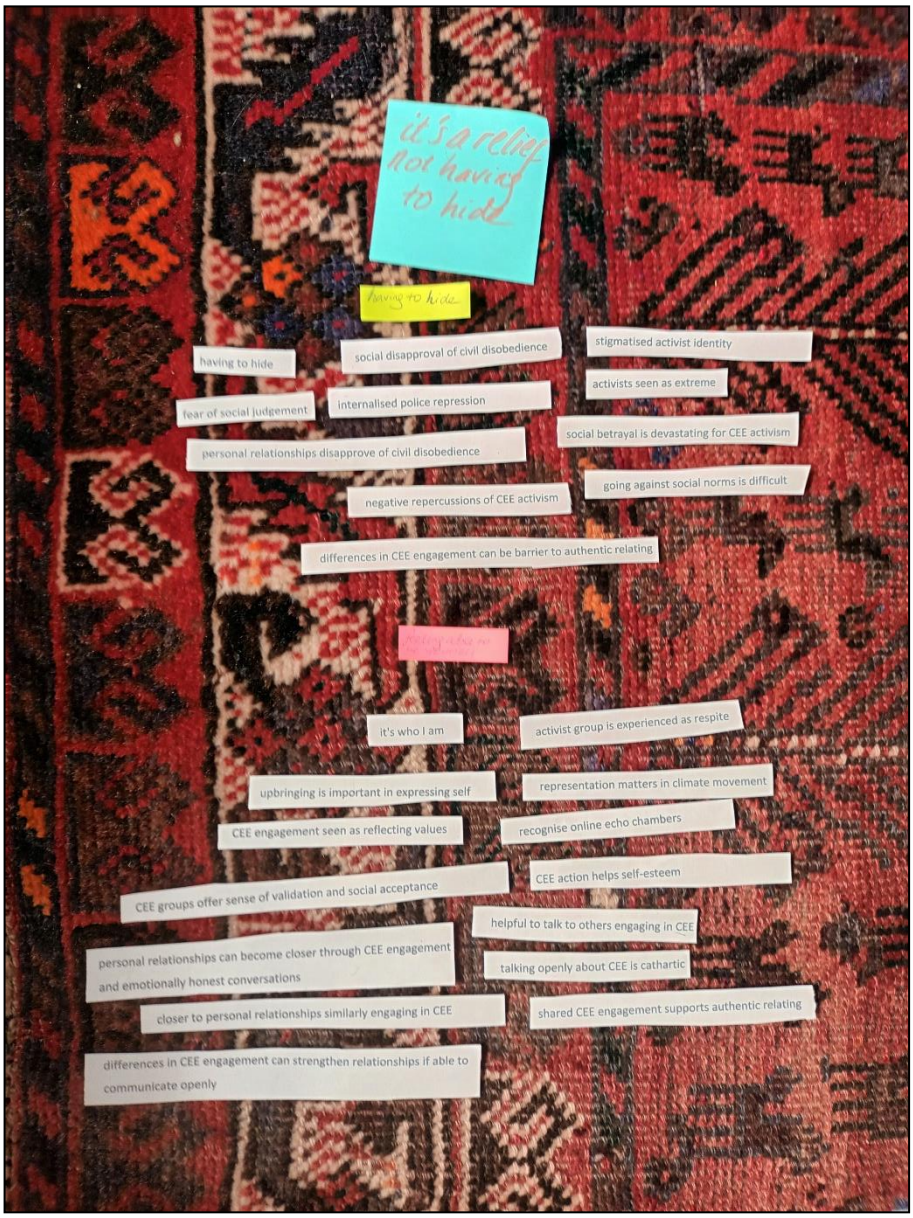
Appendix L: Photographs of Process of Theme Generation, Review and Refinement

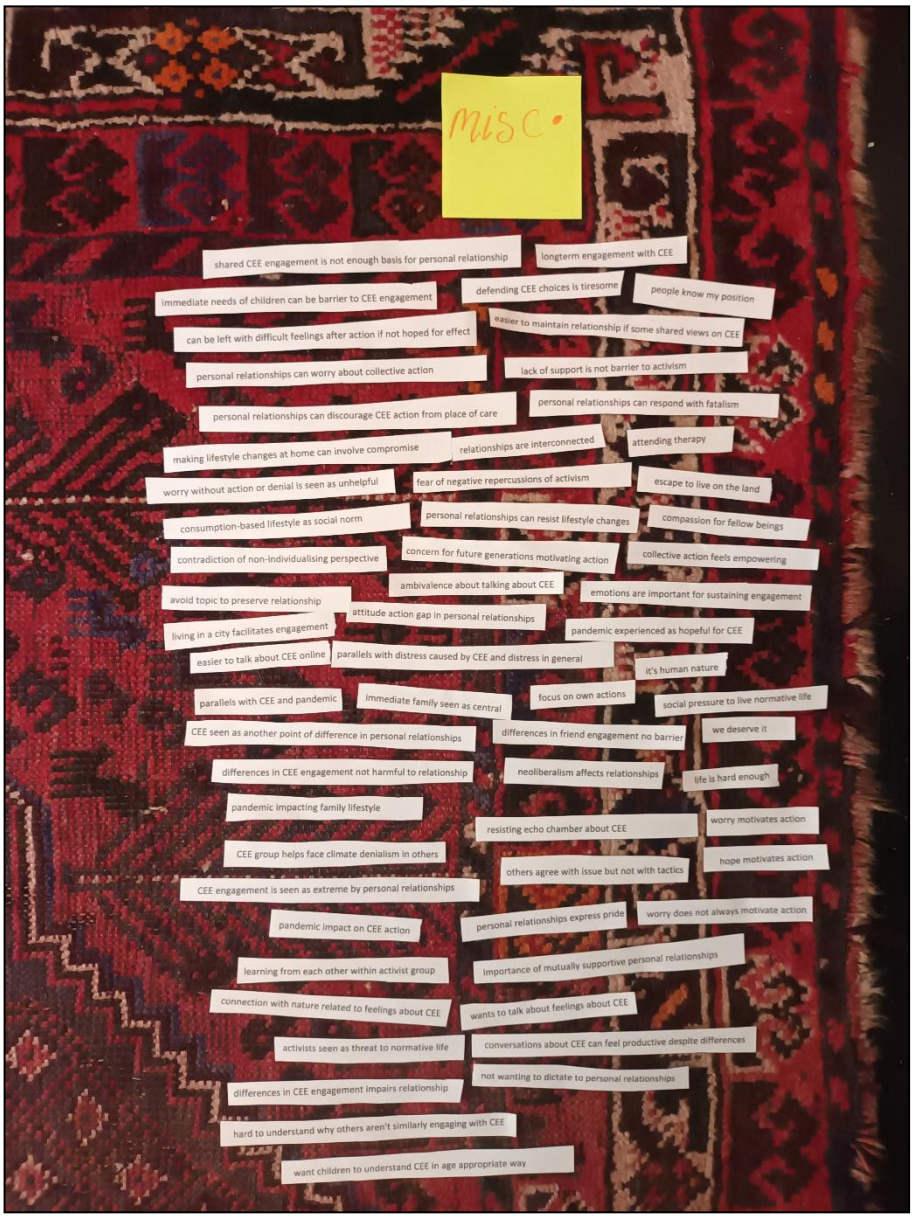


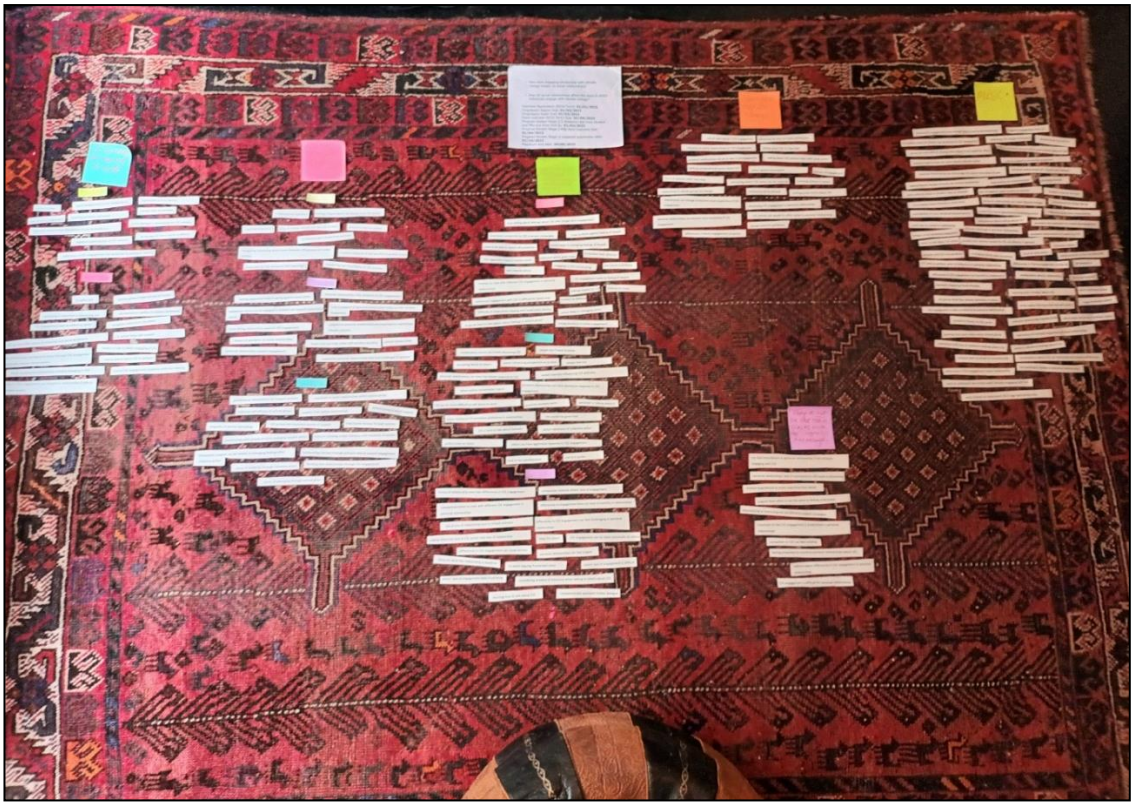

Working towards sustainable action
climate warrior narrative
feelings of guilt about not taking more CEE action
cognitive dissonance
scale of change needed can feel out of reach
activism is hard to sustain
it is hard to get a break from activism
navigating competing social norms between CEE groups and wider society
unspoken pressure of self-sacrifice in activist circles
important for CEE actions to feel meaningful
considering own boundaries re CEE activism
feeling supported helps in going against social norms
personal relationships offer solidarity in CEE engagement
supportive others not as engaged in activism can support sustainable action
trust in support of personal relationships helps counter societal disapproval
close sibling relationship supports CEE engagement
supportive personal relationships are important in maintaining climate activism
impact of pandemic on social relationships
loved ones can help soften self-sacrifice narrative
partner shares views
personal relationships support engagement
supportive personal relationships help face challenges of activism
professional relationships can support activism
important to build relationships within activist group
collective self-efficacy of activist group
support from online relationships
activist group is social support
longevity of activist friendships
CEE groups are important source of support
close bonds formed through activism
relationships with people similarly engaging support action
activism creating instant intimacy with hundreds of people
therapeutic support can be helpful in managing feelings after collective action
relationships formed through activism help to support engagement
sense of solidarity through collective action
forming new relationships through CEE engagement
sense of belonging through activist group


It's like walking a tightrope – interpersonal & intrapersonal management
stop talking about feelings about CEE after longer term engagement
emotional connection to CEE is almost intolerable
hope protects against feeling of despair
action helps in managing feelings of despair
need to be able to switch off sometimes
ecoanxiety feels different
collective action gives hope
CEE negatively impacts mental health
engaging in CEE is frustrating
the future is terrifying
pull towards denial
CEE engagement leads to feeling of despair
humour to cope with different CEE engagement in personal relationships
feeling trapped by CEE
looking for hope
emotional engagement with CEE is difficult for loved ones
humour as defence
difficulty in close others staying with loved one's distress
action helps in managing worry
it can be hard to talk openly about feelings in activist group
strong emotions in initial engagement
people don't want to know
conversation norms can inhibit discussing CEE
people feel lost
media influencing perspective on protest
disrupting denial of others
vested interests influencing CEE attitudes
personal relationships can have fear based response to CEE
personal relationships can have dismissive response to CEE engagement
others police conversation topics
positivity emotion norm
persisted in talking about it
CEE can be more difficult to talk about at work
the world has gone mad
active resistance of normative worldview in relationships
police repression of collective action
CEE is hard to talk about honestly
others can have aggressive response to CEE engagement
politics seen as taboo
you're a spoiler
have to be a professional
history of relationship overrides differences in CEE engagement
compassion towards others' lack of engagement
differences in engagement does not lead to hostility in relationships
compartmentalise to cope with different CEE engagement in personal relationships
differences in CEE engagement can feel challenging in personal relationships
risk of loss of relationship due to climate activism
keep the peace
CEE engagment can be taken personally by others
judging others for lack of CEE action risks loss of relationship
personal relationships can feel judged
differences in CEE engagement can cause tension
others' lack of engagement is difficult
focus on what the relationship is based on
no point arguing if polarised views
considering window of tolerance when talking to others about CEE
others' lack of engagement feels frustrating
compassionate approach invites dialogue
learning how to talk about CEE
form of activism shifts over time
partner shares views
activist group is social support

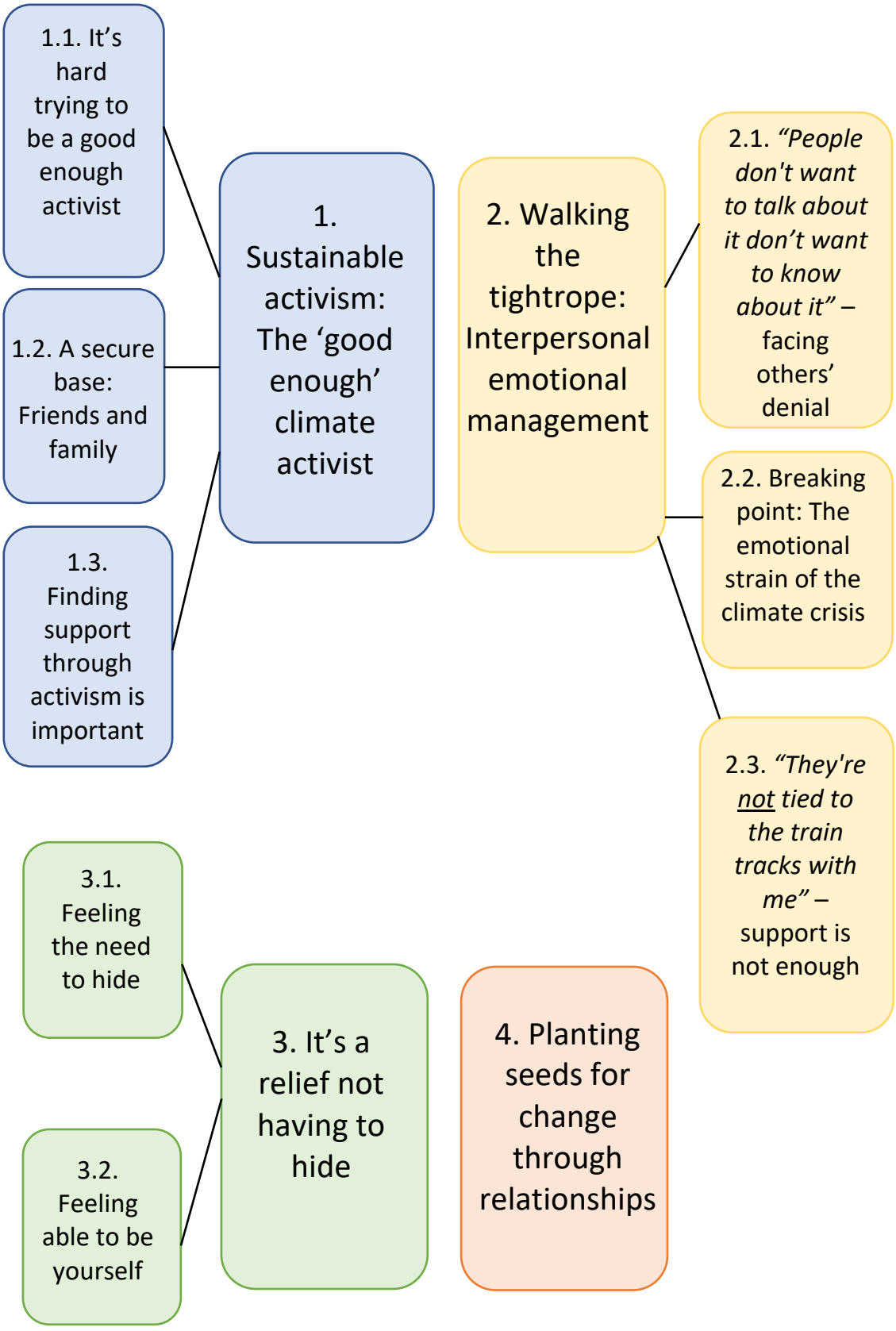

'They're not on the train tracks with me' - supports not enough
can feel more.distant in personal relationships if not similarly engaging with CEE
personal relationships' lack of connection to CEE leads to disconnect
fatalism experienced as more supportive than denial
support from others is not the same as feeling understood
downplaying or reassuring are not effective support strategies
important to feel CEE engagement is understood in personal relationships
connection to CEE can feel isolating
feeling powerless to convince personal relationships about CEE
sadness about differences in CEE engagement in personal relationships
CEE engagement is difficult for personal relationships


it's a relief not having to hide
having to hide
having to hide
social disapproval of civil disobedience
stigmatised activist identity
activists seen as extreme
fear of social judgement
internalised police repression
social betrayal is devastating for CEE activism
personal relationships disapprove of civil disobedience
going against social norms is difficult
negative repercussions of CEE activism
differences in CEE engagement can be barrier to authentic relating
it's who I am
activist group is experienced as respite
upbringing is important in expressing self
representation matters in climate movement
CEE engagement seen as reflecting values
recognise online echo chambers
CEE groups offer sense of validation and social acceptance
CEE action helps self-esteem
helpful to talk to others engaging in CEE
personal relationships can become closer through CEE engagement and emotionally honest conversations
talking openly about CEE is cathartic
closer to personal relationships similarly engaging in CEE
shared CEE engagement supports authentic relating
differences in CEE engagement can strengthen relationships if able to communicate openly


misc.
shared CEE engagement is not enough basis for personal relationship
longterm engagement with CEE
immediate needs of children can be barrier to CEE engagement
defending CEE choices is tiresome
people know my position
can be left with difficult feelings after action if not hoped for effect
easier to maintain relationship if some shared views on CEE
personal relationships can worry about collective action
lack of support is not barrier to activism
personal relationships can discourage CEE action from place of care
personal relationships can respond with fatalism
making lifestyle changes at home can involve compromise
relationships are interconnected
attending therapy
worry without action or denial is seen as unhelpful
fear of negative repercusslons of activism
escape to live on the land
consumption-based lifestyle as social norm
personal relationships can resist lifestyle changes
compassion for fellow beings
contradiction of non-individualising perspective
concern for future generations motivating action
collective action feels empowering
ambivalence about talking about CEE
emotions are important for sustaining engagement
avoid topic to preserve relationship
attitude action gap in personal relationships
living in a city facilitates engagement
pandemic experienced as hopeful for CEE
easier to talk about CEE online
parallels with distress caused by CEE and distress in general
it's human nature
parallels with CEE and pandemic
immediate family seen as central
focus on own actions
social pressure to live normative life
CEE seen as another point of difference in personal relationships
differences in friend engagement no barrier
we deserve it
differences in CEE engagement not harmful to relationship
neoliberalism affects relationships
life is hard enough
pandemic impacting family lifestyle
resisting echo chamber about CEE
worry motivates action
CEE group helps face climate denialism in others
others agree with issue but not with tactics
hope motivates action
CEE engagement is seen as extreme by personal relationships
pandemic impact on CEE action
personal relationships express pride
worry does not always motivate action
learning from each other within activist group
importance of mutually supportive personal relationships
connection with nature related to feelings about CEE
wants to talk about feelings about CEE
activists seen as threat to normative life
conversations about CEE can feel productive despite differences
differences in CEE engagement impairs relationship
not wanting to dictate to personal relationships
hard to understand why others aren't similarly engaging with CEE
want children to understand CEE in age appropriate way



Appendix M: Final Thematic Map



Appendix N: Summary of Research

Abstract

Background: Climate change is arguably the greatest threat facing humanity. Much existing research attempting to explain climate (in)action constructs a false separation between individuals and society. A relational perspective is comparatively absent in existing research.
Aims: This qualitative study aimed to improve understandings of how individuals who are engaging with climate change experience their social relationships, and to explore the role of relationships in individual and collective climate action.
Methods: Qualitative data were collected via sociograms and twelve semi-structured interviews with adults who felt emotionally affected by the climate crisis. Interview data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis.
Findings: This summary focuses on one theme of four from within a larger doctoral project. This theme centred on climate engagement as a personal and relational journey, and how small changes can have possible wider effects through networks of social relationships.
Conclusions: Counselling psychology can play a meaningful role through emphasising this relational perspective. This includes highlighting the challenges and opportunities for people engaging emotionally with the climate crisis, and how personal relationships can inspire and sustain pro-climate action. The findings contribute to existing guidance for therapists and organisations supporting personally sustainable climate action.

Background and Rationale

Psychological Relevance of Climate Change

The psychological impacts of climate change are direct, indirect, and psychosocial with disproportionate effects on the most marginalised in society (American Psychological Association [APA]/ecoAmerica, 2014; Cunsolo Willox et al., 2013; Doherty & Clayton, 2011; Hayes et al., 2018; Palinkas & Wong, 2020). Research in communities with observable climate and environmental changes has identified the negative impacts on mental health, potential links with increased suicidal ideation and the increased need for counselling services in response to these changes (Cunsolo Willox et al., 2013). Mitigation and adaptation responses are increasingly recognised as relevant to the field of psychology (APA/ecoAmerica, 2014). Psychologists have an ethical responsibility to reduce

psychological harm, to reduce global disparities in well-being, and to improve climate-related interventions (Doherty & Clayton, 2011). Psychologists' knowledge of human behaviour can help to improve understanding of the psychological responses and interpersonal processes involved in climate change (APA, 2010).

Emotions Are Key in CEE Engagement

Engagement is defined as feeling personally connected to the issue of climate change, and emotional engagement is thought to be a critical link between understanding and behaviour (Wolf & Moser, 2011). There has been a move towards viewing emotions not just as a feature of emergent action but as an essential causal component (Davidson & Kecinski, 2022; McAdam, 2017). However, there are individual and social barriers to engagement (Geiger et al., 2017; Lorenzoni et al., 2007). These barriers include psychological defence mechanisms and the constraints of social norms (Wolf & Moser, 2011).

There is a period of adjustment when people first start to engage emotionally with the topic of climate change (Randall, 2009). This engagement can produce difficult emotions, including fear, guilt and helplessness (Norgaard, 2006a). Despite engagement with climate change generating a range of emotions, levels of concern about climate change does not seem to correspond with how often it is discussed in everyday social interactions (Leiserowitz et al., 2019; Steentjes et al., 2017). Individuals can experience difficulties in social contexts with others who are not similarly engaging with the issue (Randall, 2009).

These difficulties in social interactions can be considered as a form of socially organised denial (Norgaard, 2006b) in response to negative emotions that go against sociocultural emotion norms (Norgaard, 2006a). Randall (2009) has outlined the importance of support structures for the processing of emotional responses to climate change to help guide action. When people have something to do to solve a problem, they are better able to move from despair to empowerment (Fritze et al., 2008). Therefore, action could be a useful tool and could be encouraged as a way of expressing emotional pain (Higley & Milton, 2008). However, climate change is a systemic issue, and individuals are limited in their ability to make pro-environmental behavioural choices (Berry et al., 2018). The risk in overly focusing on individual behaviour change is the continued neglect of social policy and collective action

(Berry et al., 2018). Collective action is one of the most important ways that individuals can have an impact on climate change (Clayton et al., 2015).

Relational Processes of Climate (In)action

Existing theories regarding climate (in)action fail to form a comprehensive approach (Brulle & Norgaard, 2019), and often create a false dichotomy between individuals and society (Räthzel & Uzzell, 2009). Relational thinking views patterns of thoughts, emotions and behaviours as directly related to patterns of interpersonal relationships (DeYoung, 2015). Considering infant development and attachment theory, relationships are formed before a sense of self is formed (Van Zomeren, 2014).

Responding to climate change challenges social norms related to carbon-dependent lifestyles (Lorenzoni et al., 2007), so there is an increased likelihood of resistance to implementing the changes necessary (Wolf & Moser, 2011). However, social norms are interactional and it can be useful to consider the ways that norms are interpersonally regulated through everyday interactions (Steentjes et al., 2017). Social norms have a double-edged power, as there can be competing norms around anti-climate and pro-climate behaviour (Gifford, 2011). Consequently, social norms can both facilitate and impede engagement with climate change (Steentjes et al., 2017). Social norms can develop through social networks, such as neighbourhoods and workplaces (Gifford, 2011). However, more information is needed about the process of norms crossing over normative tipping points (Steentjes et al., 2017).

Individuals are more likely to adopt a certain behaviour when relevant and trusted social groups promote and approve of the behaviour (Renn, 2011). Emotions spread through social modelling and networks (Stoll-Kleemann & O'Riordan, 2020), which could help to explain processes of norms crossing over normative tipping points. The more important social referents, such as family and friends, recognise and act on the risk of climate change, the more this amplifies an individual's risk perception (Van der Linden, 2015). Failure to respond to climate change is based in social processes which maintain and reproduce social stability, as climate change challenges this social order (Brulle & Norgaard, 2019). It is important to consider not only individual psychological aspects but also the social component of human

responses to climate change to develop a more integrated understanding of how this impacts perceptions and behaviours (Clayton et al., 2015). Research is needed on the circumstances which encourage individuals to act alone or collectively (Clayton et al., 2015).

Rationale for the Current Study

Despite calls for a relational perspective on pro-climate action (Van Zomeren, 2014), there are comparatively few studies that explicitly employ this relational perspective in the literature. A review of climate change research has identified a lack of qualitative research, a lack of consideration of mutually influencing personal relationships, and a lack of attention to how people in different forms of relationship cope with the impacts of the CEE (Tam et al., 2021). Empirical findings related to relational perspectives on activism or collective action have often not been focused on a climate engagement context, but were focused on other social justice issues (Van Zomeren, 2019). Therefore, the current study set out to investigate climate engagement more broadly including relational experiences of climate engagement.

Contexts of individual participation, such as the development of relationships between individuals, are important in sustaining participation in community organising (Christens & Speer, 2011). Methods that capture context help to consider more effective ways of intervening at family, neighbourhood, and organisational levels (Luke, 2005). Further research is needed on how individuals' perceptions of their socio-political environments relate to motivational dynamics (Van Stekelenburg et al., 2009), and on psychological mechanisms involved in the influence of social context (Hartley et al., 2016). Existing research into social networks has investigated areas such as how information about climate adaptation spreads through social networks (Cunningham et al., 2016) and likelihood of protest participation more broadly (Schussman & Soule, 2005). However, research into flow of information and practices through social networks neglects complex intersecting structural, relational, and individual influences (Hamilton et al., 2019). Therefore, qualitative research exploring experiences of social networks in more depth is needed to further understand the role of relationships in processes of CEE engagement and action.

Small-scale qualitative in-depth methodologies can offer insights into how individuals engage with climate change that cannot be gained from large-scale surveys (Wolf & Moser, 2011). Investigating engagement with climate change through a relational lens helps to situate individuals within their contexts. This fits with counselling psychology's relational focus (Milton, 2016) and its responsibility to facilitate systemic and social change (Kennedy & Arthur, 2014).

Aims and Study Design

This qualitative study aimed to explore how social relationships affect and are affected by an individual's engagement with climate change. This study was not trying to measure cause and effect in service of a particular outcome. Instead, it was focused on exploring the psychological and relational processes involved in committing to engage with and prioritise the CEE.

The research aimed to explore the following two research questions:

1. How does engaging with climate change impact on social relationships?
2. How do social relationships affect the ways in which individuals engage with climate change?

Methods

Due to the COVID-19 United Kingdom (UK) lockdowns, data were collected remotely through 12 semi-structured telephone or videoconference individual interviews. Interviews focused on exploring participants' relational experiences following engagement with climate change. Due to the focus on relational experiences, it was felt that an additional research instrument could be valuable. Therefore, sociograms (diagrams illustrating social connections) were used as an elicitation tool to aid in gathering information about the structures, meanings, and dynamics of relational experiences (Tubaro et al., 2016).

Purposive sampling was used, as it was important that participants had experience of the issues being researched (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Participants were aged over 18, English-speaking, currently based in the UK, and self-identified as feeling emotionally affected by

climate change. An ethical consideration was that people may have engaged in non-violent civil disobedience as part of their climate activism and may have ongoing court proceedings related to this. Therefore, involvement in ongoing court proceedings was an exclusion criterion, to avoid research data being subpoenaed. Recruitment was through various national activist organisations, environmental groups, and posters in community spaces throughout Bristol. Table 1 shows a summary of the demographic information for each participant in the sample.

Table 1.

Participant Demographics Table

Age	26 – 67 years	(*M* = 42.83, *SD* = 14.24)
Gender	Female Male	9 (75%) 3 (25%)
Employment status	Part-time Full-time Self-employed Full-time volunteer	7 (58.33%) 3 (25%) 1 (8.33%) 1 (8.33%)
Sexuality	Heterosexual Bisexual Other	10 (83.33%) 1 (8.33%) 1 (8.33%)
Ethnicity	White/White British White European	11 (91.67%) 1 (8.33%)
Social class	Middle Lower Middle Upper Middle Working	9 (75%) 1 (8.33%) 1 (8.33%) 1 (8.33%)
Disabled	Yes No	1 (8.33%) 11 (91.67%)
Relationship status	Married/Civil Partnership Partnered Single	6 (50%) 5 (41.67%) 1 (8.33%)
Has children	Yes No	6 (50%) 6 (50%)
Activist	Yes No	11 (91.67%) 1 (8.33%)

Ethics

Ethical approval was granted by the University of the West of England Faculty of Health and Applied Sciences Research Ethics Committee. The British Psychological Society Code of Human Research Ethics (2021) was adhered to throughout the research. The potential for

additional ethical considerations when using sociograms during interviews was managed (Tubaro et al., 2016). Informed consent was obtained before sociograms and interviews.

Analysis

Using a six-phase experiential reflexive thematic analysis (TA, Braun & Clarke, 2006), this qualitative study explored the relational experiences of people engaging emotionally with climate change. These phases included dataset familiarisation, data coding, initial theme generation, theme development and review, theme refining, defining and naming, and writing up (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The sociocultural aspects of climate change perception positioned this research within a critical realist ontology, as participants' lived experiences of climate change are shaped by culture, language, and politics (Braun & Clarke, 2013). This study's contextualist epistemology viewed knowledge and human beings who create it as contextual, partial, and perspectival (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The first author kept a reflexive journal throughout the project.

Results

This research was undertaken as part of a counselling psychology doctoral thesis and identified four main themes. This summary focuses on the theme *'planting seeds for change through relationships'* from within this larger project.

This theme related to small changes having possible wider effects through networks of social relationships, both in terms of influences on participants' own CEE engagement and their influence on others' engagement. These changes rippled outwards through personal relationships and wider society. Participants experienced personal actions around the CEE acting as a springboard for discussion and felt inspired by actions of others. Climate-related actions were able to appeal to different values held by others, even if views around the CEE were not shared. Through action and discussion, perceived social norms around the CEE were able to shift within different social settings, including within the workplace. For some participants, their upbringing played a role in their initial awareness and engagement with the CEE. Relationships were part of this journey, as relationships to activist groups shifted over the course of engagement, and family and friends grew more accepting of CEE engagement.

Some participants linked their CEE engagement with their upbringing. Juliet reflected on the role her parents had in her CEE engagement and that this was *"the first step I had understanding what was going on"*. Despite her parents not being activists, Juliet said that *"they've always had something about protecting the environment"*:

> *"I'm glad my parents get it I think my parents were actually the reason why I got interested"*– [Juliet]

This shows that shared values can be more important than shared behaviour. However, other participants did not experience differences in family values as a barrier to their own CEE engagement. Some participants spoke instead of the role of friendships in their climate engagement. For example, Ed spoke of his awareness of the CEE *"filtering in in different ways"* including the friendship below:

> *"He got involved with [CEE activist group] more he has been and has been more involved than I have been but he was on the first [protest] in [capital city] and I happened to go along a bit to that just pop in just literally walk across [the bridge] erm so I was aware then*" – [Ed]

This shows that a close friend who was more engaged with the CEE encouraged Ed to become more engaged in climate activism himself, suggesting a diversity of pathways to increased CEE engagement.

The seed can be planted both ways - from participants to others in their lives and from others to participants. In the extract below, Ed expressed how relationships mutually influence each other:

> *"It's a ripple I mean none of us are islands are we so it affect- we're affected by one of the herd is what 'why why why are they y'know why are they standing on their heads screaming' y'know they they notice"* – [Ed]

Ed expressed that through noticing the emotional engagement of others with the urgency and magnitude of the CEE, this can ripple outwards.

Many participants reflected on the impact they had on others' CEE engagement. For example, Juliet talked about noticing this growth over time:

> *"Looking back, it's like 'alright they went from there to there so clearly the conversation we had at some point uh I mean they grew up in them and now they've made some changes in their lives'"* – [Juliet]

Juliet experienced this as a process of change started through conversations had with others and influencing how friends and family were living their lives. This change was not something that was immediately visible, but at times was a slower process with seeds sprouting below the soil and roots spreading unseen. Similarly, Hannah gave an example of how her *"boyfriend's mum's now vegetarian as well"* as one of the changes she has noticed following conversations she has had with friends and family. In the quote below, Hannah expressed how seeing these changes motivates her:

> *"All my friends who aren't interested are going 'you're go- going protesting on your birthday' and I'm like I can't think of anything better on my birthday erm and then I guess for my friends who aren't interested the fact that then they're not doing it like I see very subtle changes just again drives me to do it even more*" – [Hannah]

The seeds of change planted by Hannah in others have sprouted, nourishing her activism further. Dave also voiced a sense of influencing his friends' actions in relation to the CEE:

> *"I think of myself as someone who (.) more often my friends will say to me 'oh actually we we're having one vegan night a week now because of the conversations we've had with you'"* – [Dave]

This demonstrates the importance of having conversations about the CEE. Similarly, Grace expressed how through discussion and making individual changes, others notice this and start to shift in their CEE engagement:

> *"I think it's erm probably opened up some of my relationships with other people a little bit because we've erm (.) more got them round to our way- yeah we've sort of discussed it a bit more openly and in some ways, I know we we do avoid erm the big talks but just by changing the way we do things I think that they've picked up on that"* – [Grace]

Grace experienced this as having a positive impact on relationships with others, through cultivating openness. Many participants also expressed how personal actions around the CEE can act as a springboard for discussion, as illustrated in Klara's quote below:

> *"I've probably talked about with friends like practical changes that we've made or things that or y'know if you kind of bounce ideas off other people and that kind of thing"* – [Klara]

Sharing ideas with others regarding CEE actions helps to shift social norms and practices. Some participants also spoke of actively trying to encourage CEE engagement within the workplace:

> *"This friend from work who's very much instigated this climate group"* – [Ed]

Ed described his friend as starting a climate group that he was involved with at work, demonstrating the importance of allies to help shift CEE engagement within different social spheres. Klara also talked about how her children's awareness of the CEE was reinforced by conversations both at home and in their school:

> "*It's not just they're getting a lone voice do y'know what I mean it's not an influence that's just coming from one place"* – [Klara]

This suggests that although planting a seed for CEE engagement can happen within individual relationships, sowing seeds in different communities and institutions can reinforce the importance of CEE engagement.

Participants also spoke of how others could be supportive of certain CEE actions, even if they were not engaged with the CEE. For example, Grace reflected on this experience with her father:

> *"My dad is the same in that I think he approves of he's very elderly he can't hear at all but he approves of a lot of the farming things we do and a lot of things that harking back to the way things were done in the sort of fifties when when he was young*" – [Grace]

This demonstrates that climate-related actions can appeal to different values held by others, even if views around the CEE were not shared, including a sense of nostalgia or shared history. Brigid reflected on how she makes the CEE *"more real"* for her friends and family, and related this to exposing them to information they might otherwise not be aware of or might not engage with:

> *"I think my friends and my family erm (.) y'know I think it's good that they've got they know someone who's part of [CEE activist group] because again they just get exposed to a lot of information they won't get exposed to otherwise*" – [Brigid]

Brigid's experience suggests that through being open with family and friends about being part of a CEE activist group, it is harder for them to keep their heads buried in the sand. In addition to noticing their friends' and families' budding CEE engagement, participants also reflected on their own growing engagement. For example, Hannah reflected on how her relationship to a CEE activist group had changed as she *"used to be quite resistant to them and didn't really understand why they did what they do"*. Hannah spoke of how her CEE engagement had become less difficult within friendship groups:

> *"It's nice for me to see that things did used to be quite difficult with my friendship groups whereas now (.) like I'm in quite a good place with it all"* – [Hannah]

Dave also expressed this sense of growth within his relationship with his parents:

> *"It's not been negative in any case I don't think it's damaged our relationship (.) it just took some effort to work it out which I guess is an ongoing process so yeah (.) yeah that's been fine (.) I mean they have also said they're really proud of us for doing this kind of thing so (.) that's nice to hear"* – [Dave]

Although Dave's parents were concerned for him and his brother regarding the negative repercussions of their CEE activism, their ongoing journey as a family meant that they were able to express a sense of pride in their actions despite their differences.

Although participants spoke of noticing changes germinating more slowly in others, some participants expressed finding the pandemic hopeful for the CEE as it helped them to see that large scale changes can occur quickly:

> *"When COVID happened and suddenly people weren't driving or flying and we saw a dip in the in the emissions erm and I think there was this great sense of hope actually" – [Faith]*

Faith experienced the rate of change during the COVID-19 pandemic as hopeful for the scale of change needed for the CEE.

Discussion

Some participants spoke of their early family influences on their initial CEE engagement. This influence of family of origin culture and lifestyle was noted by several participants, particularly regarding ecological thinking and sparing resources. These participants credited their upbringing with beginning their CEE awareness and engagement. This adds to existing research regarding the influence of family role models on fostering care for the natural world (Chawla, 2007) and environmental identity formation (Dewey, 2021). Other participants, however, expressed longstanding political and environmental differences with their families of origin. These results add insight into more interpersonal and situational dimensions of pro-environmental identity formation (Whitmarsh & O'Neill, 2010), by considering the ongoing role of relationships in fostering care for the environment and recognising the diversity of pathways to CEE engagement.

Participants spoke of the deepening of some relationships through their CEE engagement, both through forming new relationships within CEE groups or through increased openness within existing personal relationships. Considering these processes of forming and deepening new relationships within CEE groups, Smith et al. (2015) usefully outline how social norms and social identity can be integrated through social interaction. Discussions could be sparked by individual climate actions noticed by others, echoing previous research suggesting that actions can serve as a starting point for conversations (Webster & Marshall, 2019). Discussions validating each other's beliefs can inspire confidence to coordinate, organise and act jointly on these beliefs. This process of social change occurs through the emergences of shared injunctive norms which define new collective identities (Smith et al., 2015).

This relational perspective on CEE engagement processes highlights how relations are mutually influencing and how gradual changes can rapidly tip over into a qualitative shift (Hoggett, 2019). Ongoing influence of relationships was evident in CEE engagement, with some participants noting how their journey of engagement had been shaped by a friend's earlier involvement in CEE actions or how their journey of engagement was alongside a sibling's. This relational perspective enables a view of individuals as relational beings within varying networks of social relationships, rather than solely individuals within particular groups (Van Zomeren, 2015).

Existing explanations for social inertia regarding the CEE are disjointed (Brulle & Norgaard, 2019). The CEE challenges the everyday practices defining the 'ecological habitus' of most Western citizens (Brulle & Norgaard, 2019). Many participants, however, spoke of how adapting their communication and persisting in talking about the CEE with others formed part of shifting social norms and practices within their social groups, regarding awareness of and openness to discussing the CEE. Some participants also spoke of how their CEE actions appealed to values held by others in their lives, such as tradition. This idea of appealing to shared values fits with the Britain Talks Climate initiative, which recognises that different segments of British society are all worried about the CEE to some degree and considers how to shape national discussion in line with these values (Wang et al., 2020). Therefore, the current study supports this guidance related to adapting communication within relationships to appeal to shared values rather than more polarising approaches to climate engagement.

Although the CEE is a wider systemic issue with responses undermined by operations of power and vested interests (Beder, 2014), behaviour change within individuals' social networks is then able to shift social norms or practices available within the ecological habitus. Participants expressed a sense of efficacy in noticing these changes in CEE engagement within their social groups, and feedback from family and friends on how they had been influenced by participants was encouraging and offered a sense of hope which participants reported as motivating further action. Similar findings were reported by Howard (2022) regarding momentary hopefulness experienced when participants noticed how their social relationships had been influenced to take their own forms of CEE action.

Although feeling supported in CEE engagement or activism was an important aspect of personally sustainable CEE action, participants also expressed a sense of isolation as despite feeling supported they did not feel the depth of their CEE engagement was understood and shared by others. Comparable to Howard's (2022) findings, in the current study many participants spoke of feeling emotionally supported by partners and loved ones yet this experience of support did not fully alleviate feelings of difference or isolation due to feeling the depth of their CEE engagement was not understood. However, the current study differed from Howard's (2022) study by highlighting the dynamics of mutual influence through relationships and how family and friends can become more accepting and supportive of CEE engagement.

Avoiding dualistic thinking which separates individuals and society (Räthzel & Uzzell, 2009), the findings of this study suggest that there is a place for individual behaviour change embedded within relationships, collectives, and wider social systems. Considering individuals as embedded within their various social networks, witnessing individual behaviour change can act as a catalyst for normative tipping points and shift the repertoire of available social practices within the ecological habitus. This can also create a feedback loop through further motivating individuals already engaging with the CEE.

Limitations and Future Research Opportunities

A key limitation of the study was the lack of ethnic diversity in the sample, despite substantial attempts to recruit participants holding more diverse ethnic identities. It is important that future research considers how best to engage with a more ethnically diverse sample to access these vital perspectives. A participatory action research approach focused on co-production of knowledge grounded within communities could fit well with climate justice research and could help access these perspectives.

All but one participant self-identified as activists, although identifying as an activist was not an inclusion criterion for the study. This is highlighted here, as caution may need to be employed in applying the findings to climate activists. However, it is worth noting that an activist identity is not necessarily a straightforward identity to adopt, as activists can be associated with negative stereotypes (Bashir et al., 2013). The proportion of the population

that would be needed to be engaged with the CEE may not subjectively identify as 'environmentalists' (Cherry, 2019) or activists.

Although purposive sampling was used, participants volunteered for the study if they were interested in taking part. This could indicate that those who volunteered for the study may have had a higher motivation to act on or discuss the CEE than others within the groups sampled or within the wider population (Quimby & Angelique, 2011).

This research was broad in scope, looking at participants' experiences of navigating their emotional engagement with the CEE through their social relationships. It could also be interesting to research the relational experiences of those who are less actively engaged with the CEE while someone in their life is more actively engaged. The research methodology of reflexive TA using sociograms as elicitation tools for semi-structured interviews could be explored further through counselling psychology research.

Conclusion

The CEE is arguably the most important issue facing our planet, with widespread effects already evident across the globe (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2023). The magnitude of this issue means significant challenges remain regarding effective action to mitigate some of its associated harms. Certain challenges relate to existing power structures and vested interests upholding the status quo (Beder, 2014). This study suggests that there are opportunities for increased depth and authenticity within existing relationships and relationships formed through CEE engagement. Aided by using sociograms as an elicitation tool, this research has added to a growing relational perspective on climate engagement and suggests that there is a place for individual behaviour change embedded within relationships as this can shift social norms and practices. Experiences of hope through witnessing these changes within relationships can create a feedback loop and further motivate individuals already engaging with the CEE. This study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, therefore further research is needed into these relational experiences. This could include accessing the perspectives of loved ones supporting people who are more emotionally engaged with the CEE. Counselling psychology can continue to build more relational understandings of climate engagement.

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