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Portfolio for Professional Doctorate in
Counselling Psychology (DPsych)

Finding Your Place in the World: A portfolio of work incorporating an empirical research study on the experience of travel after existential crisis

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Table 1. Participant demographics
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Declaration

I grant powers of discretion to the Librarian at City, University of London to allow this thesis to be copied in whole or in part without further reference to me. This permission covers only single copies made for study purposes, subject to normal conditions of acknowledgement.

Preface

This doctoral portfolio combines three pieces of work that, taken together, reflect my training to become a Counselling Psychologist. Section A consists of a piece of qualitative research examining people's lived experience of travel after going through an existential crisis. Section B presents a clinical case study on a piece of psychodynamic work I completed in my final year of clinical training. Lastly, Section C consists of a journal article based on the empirical research study presented in Section A, on the lived experience of travel after existential crisis. Despite these sections being standalone pieces of work, they are united by the common theme of authenticity, and the impact that the external world (both social and physical) can have on this subjective intrapersonal experience. Below, each section will be outlined in more detail. Lastly, I will also offer some personal reflections on how these pieces of work and their overarching theme apply to my own experience, and my journey of becoming a Counselling Psychologist.

Section A: Doctoral research

This section presents the results of an original piece of empirical work conducted on the experience of travel following existential crisis. My interest in this topic is rooted in my interest in existential issues, which is one of the connecting threads throughout all my past work and studies and is the field of work and way of thinking I always seem to end up returning to. I was keen to incorporate this type of work into my training, and excited by the idea of dedicating a significant portion of time to learning about existential theory and existential therapy in more depth. During my immersion in this literature and way of thinking, I noticed that there was much more work on the negative side of the experience, such as inauthenticity, existential despair and loss of meaning, rather than on the ways in which existential meaning can be rebuilt and created. This sparked my interest in looking at different life experiences that could facilitate this positive process of meaning creation. I landed on the idea of travel as a way of working through existential issues and creating meaning in life due to my own experience and passion for travel, and the way I feel it enriches my life and continuously reshapes the way I think about myself and my way of authentically being in the world.

Therefore, with the help of my supervisors and tutors, I designed a study aimed at examining the lived experience of travel after the experience of existential crisis. Here, seven semi-structured interviews with adults who self-identify as having experienced existential crisis and consequently travelled were conducted. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

examined people's lived experience of travel from which four superordinate themes emerged: 'Seeking external and internal change', 'Connecting with one's authentic self', 'Living in the present' and 'Impact of travel on existential crisis'. Through an in-depth exploration of these themes, the work aims to add to the field of Counselling Psychology by learning about the 'therapeutic' elements of travel that can aid the working through of existential crisis, and how this can be applied to clients facing similar difficulties.

Section B: Clinical case study

This section of the portfolio presents a piece of clinical work I completed in Spring 2022 as part of my placement at a NHS Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) service in East London. Here, I worked in a primary care service that worked psychodynamically, using an object relations approach. I felt this was a relevant clinical case study to include in this portfolio as working in an object-relations informed way within a primary care setting, is reflective of the type of work I would like to focus on in future and therefore representative of a significant part of my training. The client presented in this section struggled with difficulties surrounding depression, anxiety and low-self esteem and our work together focused on examining and working through how a number of very difficult familial relationships and past traumas was impacting her mood and sense of self. In particular, we homed in on the profoundly negative impact her social relationships had on her self-esteem, and how she had created a false self in order to psychologically and emotionally survive these difficult past circumstances. Although using an object relations approach is significantly different to taking an existential approach to clinical work, the two are connected through their conceptualisation of true/authentic vs. false/inauthentic. Furthermore, they share the view that these different types of selves are profoundly impacted by one's external environment, whether this be social or physical. In this sense, it is thematically connected to the piece of empirical work presented in Section A.

Section C: Publishable article

In this final section of the portfolio, I provide a journal article based on the piece of empirical work presented in Section A. The paper presents the final superordinate theme, 'Impact of travel on existential crisis' as I felt that this would make some interesting and novel contributions to the academic field and clinical practice of Counselling Psychology. The article has been written and formatted in accordance with the submission guidelines of the *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*. I came across this journal during my literature search and selected it for a number of reasons: firstly, the remit of the journal, with its interest in humanistic topics

like existential authenticity, aligned with the remit of the research findings. Secondly, the journal presents as being open to a multidisciplinary way of working and thinking, and states that one of its aims is to broaden readers' horizons. This aim is also evident in the wide range of empirical, theoretical and creative writing pieces it includes in its publication, and felt like a good fit for my work on the psychologically little-explored topic of travel as a way of working through existential crisis. Lastly, the impact factor of the journal (1.874) felt like an appropriate level that would provide an adequately sized audience for a qualitative piece of doctoral work.

Personal reflections

It is only in retrospect, as I reflect on the content of this portfolio, and my journey to becoming a Counselling Psychologist more generally, that I realise it is no coincidence that the theme of authenticity, and the way in which the external environment can hinder or facilitate this feeling, is the connecting leitmotif of my work. This is due to a number of reasons. Firstly, the notion of being yourself and being authentic is something that both my parents, in rather different ways, modelled and instilled in me from a young age. Furthermore, having moved a lot as a child, I think I have always been very aware of the multitude of ways of being in the world, how this informed one's meaning making process about self and others, and how arbitrary this could be depending on where one was and the way of life that was most prevalent in that place.

Furthermore, I think never feeling like I fit particularly well in one place also informed my strong desire to find a place that felt aligned with my own personal values and sense of authentic self. In fact, finding such a 'place' was one of the main hopes I had for becoming a Counselling Psychologist and training at City. This is because although I have gained a lot from previous academic and work environments, I had never felt that I was quite in the right place, or surrounded by people who were interested in the same things as I was. Through this training, I hoped to be in a setting that combined my desire to work clinically in a humanistic and pluralist way, whilst still facilitating a rigorous and rich research environment. Throughout this process, I feel I have grown a lot in this respect. This is likely to be linked to two factors. On the one hand, I believe it has met my expectations in providing a setting and way of working that I feel more at home in. On the other hand, I think I have learned to be more at ease with being in settings where people being different and bringing different things to the table is not something to be eradicated, but something to be embraced. I believe these personal realisations are inextricably linked to the clinical and academic insights presented in this portfolio and demonstrate just how significant, both personally and professionally, completing such a training has been.

Section A: Doctoral Research

Finding Your Place in the World:
An interpretative phenomenological analysis of the experience of travel after existential crisis

Supervised by Dr Jacqui Farrants

Abstract

The desire to travel, to purposively change location and take timeout from one's usual everyday routine, has been linked to the desire to explore a more authentic, more personally meaningful existence (Figler et al., 1992; Kirillova et al., 2016). These are existential desires that have been shown to be lacking for individuals experiencing existential crisis, a crisis of living that creates significant anxiety by bringing to the fore issues related to lack of certainty around identity, meaning and purpose in life (Butėnaitė et al., 2016; Yang et al., 2010). The aim of this thesis is to examine the experience of travel following existential crisis in order to shed light on the underlying psychological and existential phenomena that inform this experience. To achieve this, seven semi-structured interviews with adults who self-identify as having experienced existential crisis and consequently travelled were conducted. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) examined people's lived experience of travel after existential crisis and revealed four superordinate themes: 'Seeking external and internal change', 'Connecting with one's authentic self', 'Living in the present' and 'Impact of travel on existential crisis'. Through an in-depth exploration of these themes, the work aims to add to the field of Counselling Psychology by learning about the 'therapeutic' elements of travel that can aid the working through of existential crisis, and how this can be applied to client's facing similar difficulties.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

1.1. Chapter overview

The aim of this chapter is to explore the existing literature on the role of travel as a way of working through existential crisis. The chapter will begin by outlining some of the key components of existential crisis, as well as some of the causes and experiences related to existential crisis. It will then outline some of the links between existential crisis and other mental health issues. Subsequently, the review will look at ways of addressing and working through existential crisis. Here, it will mainly focus on the field of existential therapy, which has been developed to help people struggling with the existential principles that shape the experience of living. Building on this work, the review will turn its attention to the psychologically little explored research area of travel and its role in addressing existential issues and the rebuilding of existential meaning that underlies existential crisis. Drawing on literature from the social sciences, which have long identified motivations for travel as deeply existential, the review will highlight some of the limitations and unanswered questions arising from this research, and outline how a more psychologically informed perspective could address this. This is key to understanding the topics relevance and implications to the field of Counselling Psychology. The final section of the chapter is dedicated to summarising the current state of the academic literature, before outlining the aim of the thesis.

1.2. Literature research strategy

The academic literature being reviewed is based on a comprehensive literature search on existential crisis and travel conducted between February and April 2023. In order to identify the most relevant literature, the electronic databases PsycInfo, PsycBooks and PsycArticles were searched. Relevant literature was identified through a combination of different keywords, including ‘existential crisis’, ‘existentialism’, ‘existential therapy’, ‘existential anxiety’, ‘existential uncertainty’, ‘existential authenticity’, ‘travel’ and ‘tourism’. Wildcard characters and logical operators were included in order to capture all relevant literature. Abstracts of articles were read in order to ascertain their relevance to the review and all clearly irrelevant work was excluded. In order to broaden the scope of the search, the references of relevant articles were also reviewed. Literature was limited to that published in the English language.

1.3. Understanding existential crisis

Before being able to evaluate the literature on working through existential crisis, it is important to first define what is meant by existential crisis. Reviewing the psychological literature on existential crisis, it quickly becomes apparent that there is no clear consensus on how the term is defined. Therefore, this section will first explore the definition of crisis, before critically engaging with what is meant by an *existential* crisis. It will then outline the connection between existential crisis and other mental health difficulties, such as depression, anxiety, burnout and substance abuse issues.

1.3.1. Defining existential crisis

The word crisis can be defined as “a time of great danger, difficulty or doubt when problems must be solved or important decisions must be made” (Oxford Learners Dictionary, 2023). This definition shows the time specific nature of a perceived threat or problem, as well as the focus on having to make a decision and resolve the issue, therefore requiring action and forward movement. Lastly, the use of the word ‘doubt’ emphasises the high levels of uncertainty that often accompany a crisis. An existential crisis therefore, will include all these elements. However, it will be of an existentialist nature, a term with a rich yet complex history, which must first be defined.

To make sense of this existentialist nature, a good starting point is the philosophical tradition of existentialism. Existentialism is a form of philosophical inquiry that is interested in exploring the basic conditions of human existence. Existentialism is seen to have begun with the 19th Century continental philosophy of Kierkegaard (1844), who coined the term. However, some have argued that its roots are much older, harking back to ancient Greek philosophers like Plato and Aristotle. Its starting point was the rejection of abstraction, of purely logical, objective scientific enquiry that dominated the field at the time (Arnold-Baker & Van Deurzen, 2008) .

For example, Heidegger (1927a), a seminal thinker in the field, began his philosophical enquiry wanting to explore the ontological question of what it means to be (Sein), argued that this aim cannot be achieved without taking into consideration the idea that this very enquiry rests on the fact that all human beings making these enquiries already have a particular position in the world and a way of being-there (Dasein). Therefore, all forthcoming philosophical and ontological enquiry will be shaped by this positioning, and not ever be able to achieve an

objective stance. Being-there (Dasein) refers to the particular way in which being is realised by humans. It does not refer to the biological human, but the way of life, the mode of being, shared by all members of the human community (Haugeland, 2005). Heidegger described this mode of being as being-in-the-world (In-der-Welt-sein), a phenomenological experience of being, that is inherently relational. This means that Being (Dasein) is not something out there in the world, nor is it exclusively in one's own subjective mind, but emerges from being-in-the-world-with-others (Cohn, 2005). Merleau-Ponty (1962) further developed this idea to include the importance of the body within this way of being, highlighting the embodied nature of subjectivity and being, rather than just it's cognitive component.

From this conceptualisation of Being (Dasein) and human living as relational, it is argued that Being (Dasein) is not something that can be predetermined or controlled by anyone or anything and therefore Being (Dasein) is inevitably imbued with uncertainty. This creates an openness and sense of freedom where individuals have to create their own way of living within these conditions. This is sometimes described by the idea that '*existence* precedes *essence'* (Sartre, 1943). Sartre (1943), whose philosophical work built on Heidegger's, argued that there is no one universal law that governs how to live, in the way the natural world follows the rules of physics or molecular biology, and therefore, life has no predefined meaning and individuals are "condemned to be free" (Sartre, 1943). This individual freedom is also linked to the idea of existential isolation, the idea that despite our relational nature, we are born and die alone (Yalom, 1980). Lastly, freedom is unavoidably linked to a sense of responsibility for the ways in which we choose to live. De Beauvoir (1952), who worked closely alongside Sartre, emphasised the moral implications of this principle, acknowledging that morality is achieved through acknowledging one's own freedom, but also the freedom of others within the shared human community.

Yet this is not to say that all things in life are determined by an individual's ability to choose freely. This is also linked to Heidegger's idea of thrown-ness (Geworfenheit), an arbitrary part of Being (Dasein) that refers to being born into a particular social and historical context, such as family, culture, time period, and the constraints and demands this entails (Heidegger, 1927a). Another limitation is the fact that all Being (Dasein) is being-toward-death (Sein-zum-Tode). This points towards another salient factor of Dasein which is the notion of human mortality, and the consequences of knowing that death is an inevitable part of living. To capture these fundamental existential principles that unavoidably underlie the human condition, Yalom (1980) coined the term 'existential givens', which he defined as death, freedom, meaninglessness and isolation.

Taken together, these fundamental characteristics of Dasein lead to feelings of *Unheimlichkeit*, which can be translated as both uncanniness as well as feeling not-at-home in the world (Shepherd, 2015). This creates existential uncertainty which leads to feeling ill-at-ease, unsettled and anxious. Existential uncertainty can be defined as an awareness that being-in-the-world is undetermined but finite. This uncertainty is seen as fundamental, ineradicable, and always available to be brought into awareness (Dwan, 2021). Existential uncertainty is different from ordinary uncertainty, as ordinary uncertainty does not question the limits of our existence and thereby the very basis of what it means to live and be in the world. The manifestation of existential uncertainty is not always cognitive, and can take the form of precognitive bodily sensations (Dwan, 2021). It is this existential uncertainty, derived from ontological insecurity and a lack of predefined meaning that results in feelings of existential anxiety that are to the fore during an existential crisis.

However, if this uncertainty and anxiety is ever present, what distinguishes times of crisis from non-crisis times? According to van Deurzen (2020), although feelings of existential anxiety are always available to us, they are not always at the fore of our experience. This is because humans are able to create or find meaning in life that acts as a strategy to keep these thoughts and feelings at bay. There are many ways of achieving this, including by developing a fixed sense of individual identity, or ascribing to a particular collective identity or worldview, all of which give the ontological certainty that is craved (van Deurzen, 1988). This provides individuals with a sense of meaning, which can or cannot feel personally and authentically of value. When one ascribes to a meaning that is inauthentic, one that does not take into account one's personal values but instead prioritises ascribing to an unreflective collective 'herd mentality', this is referred to as living in 'bad faith' (Sartre, 1943) or escaping into 'everydayness' (Alltäglichkeit) (Heidegger, 1927a). It is only during existential crisis, times of difficulty and doubt, where this meaning is brought into question and therefore these thoughts and feelings, and the accompanying existential anxiety, are no longer able to be avoided.

Examples of situations that trigger existential crisis are referred to as limit situations. Limit situations are extraordinary situations where people feel like the 'rug has been pulled from underneath them' and where everything is in flux (Jaspers, 1951). It can be defined as moments when the four existential givens – death, freedom, isolation and meaninglessness – are triggered and brought to the front of one's awareness. For example, the death of a loved one or being diagnosed with a life-limiting or potentially terminal illness can trigger the realisation of one's own mortality and eventual death. Alternatively, the end of a meaningful relationship, can trigger the realisation of isolation. Loss of relationships, particularly romantic relationships, can also lead to questioning assumptions about one's sense of meaning in life.

This is because the loss of the relationship can lead to a loss of what one thought one's life might look like, and that it means. This can also bring to the fore issues related to freedom, due to things being less predefined and therefore more open to different and never before considered possibilities. This change in life course can also be triggered by other aspects of life that give people a sense of meaning, such as job and career. This is because, according to Tillich (1952), lack of meaning and feelings of emptiness, as well as feelings of guilt and condemnation that one has not reached one's potential, can also lead to feelings of existential anxiety. This in turn leads people to existential questions about themselves and their purpose.

Drawing from these different elements, this thesis is based on the following definition of existential crisis: An existential crisis is a time of change and difficulty where the reality of the existentially uncertain nature of the human condition, due to ontological uncertainty (inevitable mortality and freedom) and fundamental lack of meaning, are brought to awareness and experienced as overwhelming. Though these facts of the human conditions are always available to our awareness, it is only in times of existential crisis that they are brought to the fore, thereby creating a significant level of existential anxiety. Situations that trigger existential crises are called limit situations, which include illness, bereavement, loss of relationships or other projects that give one meaning, identity or purpose. This is because this change destabilises one's previous sense of meaning, identity or purpose.

1.3.2. Existential crisis and mental ill-health

Having defined what existential crisis is, it is important to contextualise this experience within the broader mental health context, in order to establish its relevance to the study and practice of Counselling Psychology. One way to do this is to investigate the role that existential crisis plays within other mental health issues or presentations. When coming from a medical or diagnostic perspective, its relevance may not be immediately apparent as existential crisis does not appear in any standardised medicalised models of mental illness, such as the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition, Text Revision (DSM-5-TR) (American Psychiatric Association, 2022), upon which National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence guidelines (2009), which outline NHS mental health treatment protocols, are based. However, closer examination of some of the disorders that are included within these models show that existential crisis may play an important part to understanding some very common presentations.

One example of this is depression. According to the DSM-5-TR, depression is a widespread mental disorder, and can present as symptoms of low mood, loss of interest or pleasure in activities once enjoyed, loss of energy, changes in movement, speech, eating, and sleeping patterns, feelings of worthlessness and guilt, difficulty concentrating and suicidal ideation (American Psychiatric Association, 2022). This conceptualisation of depression arises from a medicalised tradition which utilises concepts such as diagnosis, disorder, symptoms, treatment and cure. It positions mental illness akin to physical illness, with discreet and measurable symptoms, and as something that can be treated and cured. However, others have been more critical of this as the only way of making sense of depression. For example, many have argued that depression can be thought of as a continuum, starting with states of "common unhappiness" (Freud, 1985) and going up to profound pathological states such as major depressive disorder, psychotic depression or bipolar disorder (Berra, 2019).

Examining the list of symptoms of depression from an existential perspective, the above list of symptoms could be interpreted as a lived experience of depression deeply impacted by existential anxiety and existential crisis. For example, many of the symptoms seem to point to a disturbance or rejection of vital elements needed to choose a meaningful living, such as energy, interest, pleasure, eating, sleeping and movement. This led Häfner (1954) to coin the term existential depression, a type of depression that is not confined to one type or severity of depression, but instead determined by the underlying thoughts and feelings that are presenting as depression. Berra (2019) defines existential depression as a consequence of questioning the fundamental meaning of life, its subsequent emptiness and feelings of nihilism. It is often connected to a feeling of anguish and malaise, and a loss of existential reference points (Berra, 2019). Unlike other forms of depression, it has no clear link to previous psychological traumas, biological causes or specific psychopathological dynamics (Häfner, 1954). This conceptualisation of depression has important implications, as it identifies a different root cause, and therefore implies that different treatment or support options are needed.

The link between existential crisis and depression also has implications for other clinical presentations due to the interconnectedness of depression to other mental health disorders, most notably anxiety disorders and substance abuse disorders (Steffen et al., 2020). For example, 50-60% of individuals with a history of depression also report a history of at least one anxiety disorder (Hirschfeld, 2001; Kaufman & Charney, 2000). From a theoretical point of view, the experience of anxiety would be in line with existential crisis, as one of its key components is an overwhelming sense of anxiety that follows the awareness of existential uncertainty (van Deurzen, 2020). Moreover, depression is also linked to alcohol use disorder

and drug use disorder (Hasin et al., 2005). From an existential point of view, this could be seen as a form of 'bad faith' (Sartre, 1943), a way of trying to escape the inescapable truths and limitations of the human condition that one might be confronted with during an existential crisis. It can be interpreted as rejecting one's freedom, and subsequent responsibility for one's choices, and a struggle to find meaning and purpose. The use of substances could also be seen as a way of wanting to escape and numb the resulting anguish that this creates. Lastly, as mentioned above, depression is linked to feelings of suicidality. From an existential point of view, this can be interpreted as the ultimate rejection of the human condition, the inability to manage the inescapable truths of living and a way of escaping this condition. Furthermore, it can be seen as the ultimate rejection of life as having purpose and meaning, the second key component of an existential crisis.

Another clinical presentation that has been linked to existential crisis is burnout. Burnout is defined as a multidimensional psychological construct that includes elements of depersonalisation, emotional exhaustion and decreased sense of accomplishment (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). It is a state that results from a prolonged exposure to stress that leaves people feeling detached from their work and sense of self. Signs of burnout include feelings of hopelessness, fatigue, boredom and irritation (Woo et al., 2020). Though exhaustion is a key component, it alone is not enough to cause burnout. Instead, exhaustion coupled with not finding work meaningful is more strongly associated with burnout (Steel et al., 2015; Westwood et al., 2017). Furthermore, burnout is associated with a mismatch between career expectations and everyday reality (Rezaei et al., 2018). This view of burnout is substantiated by a host of empirical work (Gustafsson et al., 2008; Turnbull & Rhodes, 2019). For example, Arman et al. (2011) conducted a longitudinal study looking at lived experiences of burnout survivors and found that beneath the surface of burnout, there was a 'deeper' psychological crisis that resulted from a mismatch between the image of where one wants to be and the world around them. This conceptualisation of burnout, as the result of an incongruence between aspiration and reality, can be interpreted as a form of existential crisis as people feel unable to experience their jobs as meaningful and important (Pines, 1993; Pines, 2002).

The above mental health conditions are examples of what it can be like to experience existential crisis and not be able to work through or alleviate the suffering it causes. It shows that the impact of existential crises may be larger than it initially appears, therefore further making the case for the importance of gaining the understanding and skills to better be able to help people work through existential crisis. This way of conceptualising mental illness is also an example of taking a critical stance towards the traditional medicalised model of mental illness, which can be reductionist and lead to separate diagnoses and therefore treatment

routes, despite issues having common causes, such as existential crisis. This may be a more useful way of thinking about co-morbidity of mental health issues. This is because it would avoid dual diagnoses, which has been correlated to ineffective treatment, and instead allow for more holistic and humanistic treatment interventions (Drake & Mueser, 2000). However, lastly, it is important to stress that the above existential interpretation of these mental health conditions is not relevant to all presentations, just that they may underlie some of them and therefore be important to consider for those experiencing those difficulties and for those who wish to support them and help alleviate their distress.

1.4. Working through existential crisis

Having defined what is meant by existential crisis and how it can impact people's mental health, we now turn our attention to what happens afterwards and what is known about how one can work through existential crisis. To do this, I will first outline the development and application of existential psychotherapy, its usefulness and shortcomings in addressing issues of existential crisis. Next, attention will be turned to the little psychologically explored research area of travel and its role in addressing existential crisis. Drawing on the some of the literature from the social sciences, which have long identified motivations for travel as deeply existential, the review will highlight some of the 'gaping' holes within the psychological literature (Montuori & Fahim, 2004). It will then present a critical evaluation of the research in this area, highlighting limitations and unanswered questions in relation to the experience of travel after existential crisis.

1.4.1. Existential psychotherapy for existential crisis

A good starting point to explore different ways of reacting to existential crisis is looking at the field of existential psychotherapy. Given that existential philosophy is concerned with the human condition and what this means for the experience of living, it is not surprising that it is of interest to psychotherapy and Counselling Psychology. Drawing on the work of Heidegger and other existentialist philosophers, the practice of existential psychotherapy is posited on three foundational principles: existential relatedness, uncertainty and existential anxiety (Spinelli, 2005).

Although this therapeutic modality was not developed to deal with existential crisis per se, it's primary aims are to help clients manage and overcome existential issues, such as lack of

meaning, disconnection from their authentic selves and reconnecting with their personal purpose and motivation in life (Cohn, 1997). This clearly overlaps with the issues brought to the fore during times of existential crisis and therefore provides a rich area of research and practice to examine. However, it is important to point out that this is not to say that other therapeutic modalities are not able to address these issues, just that existential therapy does so most explicitly.

Existential psychology is often described as an approach, rather than a system of therapy (Prochaska & Norcross, 2018). According to van Deurzen (1988), existential psychotherapy, at its core, is a process aimed at allowing clients to rediscover their own values and beliefs, and explore what makes life meaningful. It focuses on concerns that are rooted in an individual's existence, and focuses on the lived, subjective, phenomenological experience of a person. This means it is a largely descriptive process, giving clients the space to describe their life and issues in great detail. This process of description is mapped out across four dimensions of human experience: the physical dimension (Umwelt), social dimension (Mitwelt), personal dimension (Eigenwelt) and spiritual dimension (Überwelt) (Arnold-Baker & Van Deurzen, 2008).The first three dimensions were initially laid out by Heidegger (1927a) and later adapted by Binswanger (1946) to be used within a therapeutic context. The fourth dimension, the spiritual dimension, was later added by van Deurzen (2009).

The physical dimension refers to the natural world and environment. It explores one's bodily needs and senses, and how this impacts our experience of living. It also relates to the physical realities of our lives, our health, bodies and material wealth. Therefore, it is also related to concerns of life, death and feelings of physical safety. The social dimension focuses on social relationships with other people, such as family, friends, colleagues, acquaintances and strangers. Beyond relationships with others, it also taps into one's way of engaging with the public realm, and the tools used to do this, such as culture and language. It also includes issues linked to sociodemographic factors such as gender, nationality, race and culture. The personal dimension refers to one's intimate world and relationship to one's self. This sense of self and identity is constantly evolving and impacted by relationships with others. It refers to an individuals' thoughts, feelings and behaviours, and what is perceived as their strengths and weaknesses. Lastly, the spiritual dimension is the world of beliefs and aspirations that transcend beyond the three other dimensions, in the hope of achieving truth and wisdom. This can include one's relationship to religion, but not necessarily, as it refers more generally to how individuals create meaning and purpose in their lives (Van Deurzen & Arnold-Baker, 2017).

Existential therapy purports a holistic approach to understanding the human experience of living. As such these dimensions are not intended to reduce the human experience to these domains, instead they merely aim to be a practical theoretical tool to orientate both therapist and client and help identify areas of living that may be out of balance (Van Deurzen, 1988). By exploring these dimensions, one is able to discover within which dimensions the client feels more at home and at ease, and which are associated with more difficulty. By going through this process, the client's values, attitudes and beliefs come to the fore more explicitly, and facilitates reflection on how these are impacting and serving the client, potentially highlighting areas in which they may want to re-evaluate and reformulate some of their attitudes, beliefs and values (Cohn, 1997).

Another important area of existential therapy is exploring to what extent the client is an active participant in their life choices, particularly in their relationships to the outside world, and whether they are able to take responsibility for their choices. This may involve the therapist challenging the client, through open and honest reflection in order to identify any possible self-deception (Van Deurzen, 2009). Throughout this process, particular attention is paid to the emotions with which these different areas of living are imbued, what these reveal about the client and how this impacts them, in the past, present and future. By going through this process of exploration and bringing these facets of themselves and their experience to the fore of their awareness, clients are able to get in touch with their own identity, motivation and purpose, with the ultimate aim of creating a more fulfilling and meaningful life (Spinelli, 2005). Furthermore, as van Deurzen (2020) purports, existential therapy aims to foster 'existential courage': the courage needed to rebuild meaning and connection in life after times of crisis. This is because in crisis, connections and meaning, based on assumptions and beliefs people hold about themselves, others or the world around them, are shattered and new actions are needed to reconstruct meaning (May, 1994).

Looking back to what it means to experience an existential crisis, it seems like the aims of existential therapy are well aligned with the concerns of existential crisis, most notably a lack of meaning and an increased feeling of existential anxiety. However, this is not to say that existential therapy is without its critics and shortcomings. Here, the most significant shortcoming is the limited empirical evidence on whether existential therapy is able to effectively achieve the aforementioned aims it purports to achieve. However, the lack of empirical evidence of the effectiveness for existential therapy is not seen as a problem for many existential therapists. This is because they argue that this quantitative way of measuring impact goes against the ethos of existential therapy. For example, van Deurzen (2009) notes that the general approach of existential psychotherapy is one of the most 'free' forms of

therapy, and that this adds to its effectiveness by allowing the therapist to go where the client wants them to be not where they should be, and therefore is not something that can or should be standardised or manualised. Furthermore, others have argued that a quantitative measure cannot capture the diversity of the approach and depth of outcomes (Cooper, 2016). Others view these empirical studies as reductionist and dehumanising, which goes against the foundational principles of the approach. Lastly, some have argued that this is because the existential concepts that are being addressed are complex constructs and therefore more difficult to operationalise and study.

Nevertheless, empirical evidence for the effectiveness of therapy is an important aspect to consider as one of the foundational principles of Counselling Psychology is the notion of evidence-based practice (Douglas et al., 2016). Therefore, Counselling Psychologists have conducted meta-analyses in order to examine the effectiveness of existential therapy. For example, a meta-analysis conducted by Vos et al. (2015) evaluated the effectiveness of 15 Randomized-Control-Trials (RCTs) to study the impact of different existential therapies on a number of positive psychological metrics, including positive meaning in life, psychopathology (anxiety, depression, avoidance and intrusion) self-efficacy and self-reported physical wellbeing. Of those interventions, the only statistically significant impact was from meaning therapy, which is one of the four schools of existential therapy based on the teaching of Frankl (1976) that aims to help clients create meaning and purpose in their lives, with adults with physical diseases (such as cancer). Here, when compared to those participating in a social support group, being on a waiting list or receiving care as usual, meaning therapy allowed people to connect with greater meaning and purpose in life, decrease their level of psychopathology and strengthen their sense of self-efficacy (Vos et al., 2015). This finding is relevant to the study of existential crisis as being faced with potentially terminal or life-altering physical illness is one example of a limit situation, which is conceptualised as triggering existential crisis. Nevertheless, outside of these studies, which are based on only one school of existential therapy, practiced mainly in North America and executed in physical health settings, quantitative evidence for the effectiveness of existential therapy remains sparse.

Looking beyond existential therapy, other fields of research have long identified addressing existential themes during times of crisis as of great importance for greater wellbeing, lesser psychopathology and a higher quality of life. For example, having a greater sense of meaning in life has been shown to be critical in coping with stressful life events (Park, C. L. & Folkman, 1997; Park, J. & Baumeister, 2017), as well as negatively correlated to experiencing symptoms of psychopathology (Steger, 2012). Moreover, a vast amount of evidence from the terror management theory (TMT) literature, which investigates the way in which salience of our own

mortality impacts human experience and functioning, shows that mortality salience is positively associated with self-esteem and meaning seeking (Greenberg et al., 1986; Greenberg et al., 2014). Lastly, research on the phenomenon on post-traumatic growth shows that individuals are able to grow along existential dimensions, such as increased appreciation for life, more meaningful relationships, increased sense of self-efficacy and a richer existential and spiritual experience of life, when facing limit situations (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).

Given the still limited evidence as to the effectiveness of existential psychotherapy, combined with the wealth of evidence pointing towards the importance of addressing existential issues in order to foster wellbeing and overcoming crisis, it is worth exploring other interventions further afield that might be able to help address the existential issues that are at the fore during an existential crisis. This is the topic of the next section.

1.4.2. Travel: An underexplored remedy for existential crisis?

Despite some recognition of travel as an interesting psychological phenomenon, there is a 'gaping hole' in psychological research on the positive impact of travel (Montuori & Fahim, 2004). However, this is not to say that other disciplines have not investigated this phenomenon. In fact, the field of tourism studies, an interdisciplinary field that cuts across sociology, history, geography and economics, first started studying the existential elements of travel in the 1990s. This section will begin by reviewing the literature from this field of research. In particular, it will focus on the concept of 'existential authenticity' within travel and tourism[1], and the vast amount of empirical and theoretical work that has been completed on this topic. Through critical engagement with this literature, limitations and gaps will be highlighted. Lastly, this section will give an outline of the limited psychological literature on the experience and benefits of travel, again highlighting gaps in the academic knowledge, particularly as it pertains to travel as a reaction to existential crisis.

1.4.2.1. Travel and existential authenticity

[1] Throughout the remainder of the thesis, the words travel and tourism will be used interchangeably. This is due to the fact that I have used the word travel, the act of purposively changing geographical location and taking timeout from one's usual everyday routine, in order to capture the experience I am interested in studying. However, the tourism studies literature uses the word tourism, a word which alludes to the economic market aspects of the experience, to capture the same concept I am interested in studying.

Building on the seminal work of Boorstin (1964) and MacCannell (1973), who both critiqued mass tourism due to the staged and inauthenticity of toured objects and events, Wang (1999) introduced the term 'existential authenticity' to the tourism literature. Rather than focusing on the objective authenticity or realness of material objects and practices, Wang (1999) aimed to create a framework to capture the interpersonal and intrapersonal process of feeling a sense of existential authenticity, which he described as "a special state of Being in which one is true to oneself" (p. 358). According to Wang (1999), travel can allow an individual to attain this state when they situate themselves in the world in a way that is aligned with their own personal value system, which is experienced as in line with their sense of identity, how they wish to operate in the world and what feels meaningful to them. It is in line with the work of Frankl (1976) who purported that striving for meaning in life is people's primary motivational force. This state of being is the opposite of feeling alienated from everyday life, due to not feeling connected and able to act in line with one's true self, as well as not feel a meaningful sense of connection with the world around them (Kim & Jamal, 2007; Steiner & Reisinger, 2006; Wang, 1999).

This area of literature is relevant when looking at the experience of existential crisis. This is because, as outlined above, the predicament that stands at the heart of living/the human condition according to existentialist philosophy is that humans are 'thrown' (Heidegger, 1927a) into a world characterised by meaningless, inevitable death, unconditional freedom and universal alienation (Yalom, 1980). This creates existential anxiety, that is inherent to living and must be managed for psychological wellbeing to be achieved (May, R., 1994). In order to manage this anxiety, these existential givens must be confronted. Existential crisis arises when these givens are at the fore of awareness, and the person feels overwhelmed and unable to manage the resulting anxiety. This is because they do not rest securely in a personal value system that, despite these givens, is able to create a sense of personal meaning, connection to others, and an acceptance of the freedom and responsibility that this bestows on the individual. In that sense, they are lacking the feeling of existential authenticity that is described by Wang (1999). This is not to say that everyone seeking existential authenticity is experiencing existential crisis, but that everyone experiencing existential crisis could benefit from experiencing existential authenticity, as it would resolve the issues that are most to the fore and most distressing during existential crisis. Therefore, exploring the vast and rich literature on how travel has been linked to achieving existential authenticity is likely to provide an important piece of understanding necessary for exploring the experience of travel after existential crisis.

Having defined what is meant by existential authenticity, and how it links to the experience of existential crisis, the next question is *how* travel allows people to access feelings of existential authenticity. Wang argued that tourism enabled the experience of existential authenticity by allowing people to live more freely and spontaneously because they are able to temporarily transcend their usual daily lives and the limitations this places on the ways in which they can be (Wang, 1999). This is because during travel, one is able to engage in thoughts and behaviours where self, rather than societal or familial expectations, are to the fore. According to Wang, this can be done in a number of ways. The first is through the intrapersonal mechanisms of 'self-making' and 'bodily feeling'. 'Self-making' refers to the way one can connect with one's true self, one that is aligned with one's value system, through cognitive reflection. 'Bodily feeling' is where the same connection with authentic self can be achieved through somatic pathways, such as by taking part in new activities that positively impact on the body. The second way to achieve this state of existential authenticity is through interpersonal mechanisms. The interpersonal mechanism he specifies are meaningful social connection with others, either with close others like family and friends, who one has time to connect with on a deeper level whilst travelling, or with like-minded others, who are drawn to the same type of travel activities and who provide a sense of community.

This thinking is in line with the work of Adler (1975), who argued that travel offers a unique opportunity for self-development as its exposes the usually invisible social and cultural patterns that are deeply embedded within people's sense of self. Travel fosters these processes because travel breaks people away from what is habitual and self-evident by releasing individuals from their ordinary social norms and pressure to conform. Furthermore, the confrontation with external otherness exposes people to new systems of value and meaning making, thereby forcing confrontation with their own value systems, and thereby, their own sense of self. Being at a distance from one's everyday life allows for a different and new perspective to shed new light on familiar ways of being. It fosters contemplation and reflection and may open people up to other ways of being. This can be understood as a way of accessing a meaningful and purposeful engagement with the outside world, which is key to achieving existential authenticity. This conceptualisation of the function and ability of travel mirrors the strategies outlined above in recovering from existential crisis (Pines, 2002; Turnball & Rhodes 2019), by exposing, reflecting on and potentially shifting one's ideas of self, meaning and purpose.

Over the past 20 years, there has been a flurry of work based on Wang's (1999) conceptualisation of existential authenticity. For example, a review of the concept of authenticity within tourism studies, which employed multiple methods of systematic literature

review and bibliometric analysis (including descriptive statistics, thematic analysis and keyword co-frequency analysis) reviewed 102 texts on existential authenticity published between 1979-2020 (Rickly, 2022). The majority of empirical studies pertain to a particular type of tourism. In reviewing the literature, the types of tourism most linked to experiencing existential authenticity are: pilgrimage, wellness tourism, backpacking/adventure tourism, volunteering, cultural/educational exchange programmes and sport tourism. This does not mean to say that they are the only ways of experiencing existential authenticity. In fact, Brown (2013) calls for more research on other areas of more mainstream tourism, such as caravanning, and that these have been overlooking and under-researched. However, by looking at the already existing research, one is able to draw out some key themes with regards to how travel impacts existential authenticity.

For example, one of the oldest forms of travel that has been linked to existential authenticity is pilgrimage. Pilgrimage refers to a journey to a sacred place or shrine, which is the ultimate reason for embarking on travel. It involves transforming a spiritual journey into a physical search (Béres, 2018). Using a grounded theory approach, Devereux & Carnegie (2006) explored individuals experience of completing the Santiago de Compostela trek, and found that the experience resulted in both physical and emotional wellbeing, a better understanding of self and of others, as well as a chance for renewal that impacted their life beyond the duration of the trip.

These findings are echoed by another area of tourism, wellness tourism, which has also been linked to a desire for existential authenticity and meaning making. Wellness tourism is defined as travel by individuals whose motive is, either entirely or partly, to maintain or enhance their health and wellbeing (Voigt et al., 2011). For example, a survey-based study investigating the motivations of 75 yoga tourists in the US found that the four overarching motivations for attendees was seeking spirituality, enhancing mental wellbeing, enhancing physical condition and controlling negative thoughts (Lehto et al., 2006). Furthermore, a mixed-methods study by Voigt et al. (2011) examined the benefits sought by people engaging with three different types of wellness tourism: beauty spa, lifestyle resort and retreat visitors. They found six key benefits emerged: transcendence, physical health and appearance, escape and relaxation, important others and novelty, re-establish self-esteem and indulgence. ‘Transcendence’ refers to self-awareness at a spiritual and psychological level. The combination of ‘important other and novelty’ is explained by the researchers as being the consequence of most wellness tourisms preferring to travel alone and establishing new relationships with people. A leitmotif that cut across the six factors was the desire for self-transformation. However, visitors differed in their approach to achieving this self-transcendence. Lifestyle resort visitors focused more

on physical health and appearance, retreat visitors focused mainly on transcendence, whereas indulgence was only mentioned by visitors of the beauty spa.

Looking across these findings, it is possible to link many of these themes to Wang's (1999) intrapersonal and interpersonal mechanisms of accessing a state of existential authenticity. For example, transcendence, understanding of self, mental wellbeing and renewal are all examples of self-making. Physical wellbeing, relaxation and indulgence are examples of positive bodily feelings. Lastly, connecting with important others and gaining a better understanding of others are examples of forming meaningful and enhancing relationships with others and the external world around them.

Another area of tourism which has been widely linked to the experience of existential authenticity is backpacking, defined as tourists who use budget accommodation, stay in a place longer than average, have more flexible travel plans and are more actively involved in the local social environment (Richards & Wilson, 2004). This is due to several factors. A large part of the backpacking experience is the notion of freedom. Whilst backpacking, one is free of the usual everyday constraints back home, having temporarily suspended some of one's commitments and responsibilities, thereby allowing for space for self-actualisation. This is also partly to do with escaping society's 'levelling out' process, conforming to the social norms and roles, thereby providing more space for self-expression and individuality (Canavan, 2018; Collins-Kreiner et al., 2018; O'Regan, 2016). Backpacking also emphasises moving between different places and increasing spatial freedom. Furthermore, backpacking trips are often longer thereby giving people more temporal freedom as well. Beyond increases of freedom, backpacking also exposes people to new cultures and people and new ways of living that can broaden one's perspective on self and living. Lastly, being surrounded by similar others can also contribute to this sense of connecting with one's true self and experiencing existential authenticity.

Similar to the experience of backpackers, the experience of international students studying abroad is another area that has been linked to personal transformation due to a sense of newfound freedom. A study by Brown (2009), showed that the impact of being removed from the familial home provided students with freedom from other people's expectations, as well as the opportunity for self-discovery due to being exposed to new ways of living. These are all examples of self-making, which are a key part of existential authenticity (Wang, 1999).

Volunteer tourism is another example of a type of travel that seeks to provide individuals with meaningful experiences. It involves willingly giving services to others, and often involves

meeting like-minded people and being exposed to new and exotic locations (Brown, 2009). Although the primary aim of volunteer tourism is being in the service of others (communities, species, habitats), the benefits to the individual volunteer have also been examined (Meneghini, 2016). It has been shown to stimulate personal growth by exposing people to new challenges and hardships, which increases an individuals' sense of confidence as well as self-knowledge (Galley & Clifton, 2004). It is also linked to changing people's perspective on their lives and the world in general (Broad, 2003). This is another example of the way in which travel, through the facilitation of existential authenticity, can be personally transforming and provide meaningful experiences that impact people's attitudes, values and behaviours (Alexander, 2012).

Lastly, sport tourism, defined as travel which involves the participation in or observation of sporting events, has also been found to provide individuals with the experience of existential authenticity (Takata & Hallmann, 2021). For example, a study by Shipway et al. (2016) showed that cycling event participants experienced existential authenticity due to the high level of engagement with the cycling course and the intense bodily feelings that this physical and mental work required. Another study exploring the experience of lifestyle climbers also found that the physical immersion and exhaustion of the activity provided access to feelings of existential authenticity (Rickly-Boyd, 2012). Moreover, they described the challenge of climbing and the inherent uncertainty of the experience as a mechanism for growth and self-discovery, as well as the importance of the climbing community as ways of accessing feelings of existential authenticity (Rickly-Boyd, 2012). These findings are in line with Wang's (1999) intra- and interpersonal mechanisms of bodily sensations, connections with others, and self-making.

Having reviewed the most relevant literature on the impact of travel on existential authenticity, the next section will evaluate how this knowledge can be built on in order to better understand the experience of travel after existential crisis.

1.4.2.2. Limitations of travel literature for understanding existential crisis

Despite the wealth of research on the existential impact of travel, there remain some unanswered questions that are pertinent to the understanding of the therapeutic benefits of travel in working through or overcoming existential crisis. For example, despite the wealth of evidence supporting the idea of experiencing existential authenticity whilst travelling, less is understood about how this impacts individuals when they return from their travel. Wang (1999) initially proposed that travel preformed a restorative function, meaning that travel allowed

individuals a temporary break from inauthenticity that then allowed them to better endure the inauthenticity that would be waiting for them back home. This is different to Brown's (2013) assertion that the travel experience can act as a catalyst of stimulus for existential authenticity beyond the time of travel. There is limited empirical evidence examining this phenomenon.

One study that has attempted to do this is Kirillova et al. (2016) which utilised US survey data to investigate which factors lead to changes in feelings of existential authenticity and existential anxiety. Using a cross-sectional survey to capture 479 participants; 'most memorable vacation trip experience', they measured various trip-related information (trip duration, travel party size, setting), existential authenticity (Wood et al., 2008), meaningfulness (May, D. R. et al., 2004), existential anxiety (Weems et al., 2004), sociodemographic details and various control variables (such as self-consciousness, resilience and hardiness). The results showed that travel allowed individuals to reconnect with their personally meaningful value systems and revealed changes in existential authenticity that persisted beyond the time of the travel experience.

However, due to its quantitative nature, the study fails to unpack the richness of what these categories mean to people, and thereby fails to provide a more comprehensive understanding of what people think and feel about these existential motivations, how they play into their lives as a whole as well as how they are made sense of in relation to other needs and life aspirations. Furthermore, one can only hypothesise what the reasons for this change may be, and what impacts whether changes last longer or shorter amounts of time. Turning to theory, one could hypothesise that it may be due to a change in perspective, and the ability to gain an outsider perspective on one's own life and how one is choosing to live it. This allows people to question their own taken-for-granted assumptions on what the best way to live is. It allows people to question whether their own personal value system is aligned with that of their home environment (such as cultural, societal, familial) and has the potential to destabilise or reinforce their attitudes towards the norms and values of their home culture. However, more empirical work is needed to examine this. Furthermore, it is not clear what factors differentiate between individuals whose feelings of existential authenticity and anxiety translate into living more authentically after travel, and those who succumb to the 'fade-out-effect' (Kirillova & Lehto, 2015) and return to living less authentically. Using empirical measures to try and understand which factors, either individual or social, may be creating this disparity is salient if one is trying to understand and harness the therapeutic and wellbeing giving effects of travel.

Although theory can be useful in generating greater understanding, the lack of research methods to empirically capture the underlying psychological processes that could be

impacting this shift is another limitation to the research. Although understandable due to the social scientific nature of the field of tourism studies, research from a psychological perspective would allow more light to be shed on the mechanisms and salience of psychological processes that are clearly present in these experiences. One study that addresses these issues is one by Hirschorn & Hefferon (2013) that looked at the relationship between cross-cultural travel and personal growth. Looking at the domain of career-break travel in early to mid-career (ages 25-38), a grounded theory approach was taken to explore how extended cross-cultural travel (minimum of three months) can lead to personal growth. The researchers employed unstructured interviews, only specifying the topic of the interview and then simply asking participants to expand on the topics they brought up naturalistically. The findings showed a clear existential thread with the three main themes emerging as 'existential yearning to travel', 'courage' and 'discovering authenticity'. Within these themes, participants spoke of the desire for something 'more' and the role of time and mortality awareness in triggering this yearning. They expressed the need to be courageous and to take a leap into the unknown in order to satisfy this yearning. Throughout the process of travelling, participants reported a greater focus on intrinsic values, a connection with their 'true self' and a subsequent implementation of these changes upon their return home.

Though the work of Hirschorn & Hefferon (2013) offers a robust piece of empirical work, there are a number of limitations which future work could address. One issue is linked to the unstructured naturalistic interview technique. Though this method allows for ecologically valid data to be collected, the strong reliance on participants to bring up relevant content misses the opportunity to explore specific aspects of cross-cultural travel in more depth. Furthermore, the relatively short interviews (ranging from 22 to 36 minutes) may be a result of this technique and could suggest that there may be more content to explore and unpack. Moreover, it does not specifically focus on existential crisis, although it is possible that some of the participants would have had this experience. Lastly, the study is part of a wider trend in using concepts from positive psychology to inform the study of travel. For example, recent work has explored how concepts like post-traumatic growth (Liu et al., 2023) eudaimonia (Knobloch et al., 2017) and flourishing (Filep & Laing, 2019) can be positively impacted by travel. However, by taking a broader positive psychology approach to the topic, there is also a lack of a deeper psychologically-informed exploration of the existential issues which are clearly present in people's experiences.

Another striking finding from the literature is the overwhelmingly positively skewed findings on the experience of travel. It is plausible to think that certain experiences whilst travelling also impacted individuals negatively, yet these are not captured in much of the existing literature.

One study tried to capture this by measuring the level of existential anxiety people experienced whilst travelling . Here, it was found that travel increased people's levels of existential anxiety. However, increase in existential anxiety was also positively correlated to an increase in existential authenticity. This may, prima facie, seem counterintuitive. However, as travel allows one to escape the routine everydayness that protects people from confronting this existential anxiety, it appears logical that travel, by eradicating this deep involvement in everydayness where one is limited to known social roles and functions, would also increase existential anxiety (Heidegger, 1927a). Furthermore, it can be interpreted that it is not possible to experience a positive shift in existential authenticity without processing the attached existential anxiety.

Lastly, to the best of my knowledge, there is no previous research looking at the experience of travel after existential crisis. Despite a lot of research on the existential nature of travel, none specifically focus on examining the experiences of individuals who self-identify as having experienced existential crisis. This is worth exploring as there are likely to be differences between these people's experiences. This is because one striking difference is that people who have experienced existential crisis have already been exposed to a liminal situation. By travelling, they are seeking to experience another liminal situation. This is likely to impact their experience differently to those who do not identify having experienced a liminal situation that triggered the desire for travel. Furthermore, it is a way to hone in one the possible existential mechanisms that may be at play whilst travelling, and to uncover these in more depth and with more focus than previous studies.

1.5. Relevance and implications for Counselling Psychology

Throughout this literature review, I hope to have demonstrated the relevance of the topic of travel after existential crisis to the field of Counselling Psychology. The first case to be made is the relevance of existential crisis to the practice of Counselling Psychology. As outlined above, this is not just one type of clinical presentation, but also linked to a number of other common clinical presentations such as depression, anxiety, burnout and substance abuse disorders. Although it does not underlie these presentations all the time, it is important to gain an understanding of when it is relevant as this will have impact on the most effective treatment plan. Furthermore, working on these issues falls most directly into the realm of existential therapy, one of the main modalities captured within the Counselling Psychology domain (Cooper, 2016), and one that is aligned with its humanistic ethos.

The second case to be made is the relevance of studying the experience of travel. Looking across the above outlined tourism literature, there are some common themes that emerge, that can all be captured by the idea of positive intra and interpersonal change, a key interest to the field of Counselling Psychology (House & Feltham, 2016). From an existential perspective, a number of key findings stand out. The first is the importance of the existential givens freedom and meaninglessness that seem to be at the core of the travel experience. By escaping one's usual everydayness, taking oneself out of one thrownness and immersing oneself into another, allows for more personal freedom and for the ambiguity but also possibilities of creating different types of meaning to be brought to the fore. These are also important factors that need addressing when experiencing existential crisis and reflective of the themes that existential therapy has identified as key to helping clients (Cooper, 2016). However, there are, unsurprisingly, some key differences between the two. By exploring the experience of travel, it may be possible to inform new ideas and strategies for the practice of existential therapy, and Counselling Psychology in general, in order to more effectively help alleviate the distress caused by existential crisis.

The first, and most evident, difference between existential therapy and travel is that experientially, going to see a therapist in a consulting room once a week over a period of time, is very different to taking a step away from one's familiar everyday life and temporarily changing one's physical and social environment. One key impact of this difference may be in the way in which the existential change and learning takes place. Although both involve new relationships with others and cognitive effort through reflection, travel is, one could argue, a much more embodied and immersive experience than talking therapy. The importance of the embodied experience in shaping our experience and perception is in line with the existentialist work of Merleau-Ponty (1962), and a key part of understanding the existential factors of living. Furthermore, the importance of environmental factors, the social and physical world, is also reflected in the work on the different dimensions of living that must all be taken into account when dealing with existential concerns (van Deurzen, 2009). The nature of travel seems to be well-equipped in dealing with these dimensions of living. One of the potential benefits of this approach is the larger focus on changes in physical and somatic feelings and its impact on issues of dealing with existential anxiety and regaining a sense of personally aligned meaning in life. This could be one way in which the area of travel could provide a meaningful addition to the therapeutic treatment of existential crisis. Looking beyond existential therapy, it may also be a way of integrating existentially informed work with other modalities that have traditionally focused more on the importance of the body and somatic experiences, such as

mind-body therapies like Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) (Sipe & Eisendrath, 2012). This type of integrative work is also aligned with the ethos of Counselling Psychology.

Another difference between working through existential crisis through therapy and travel is that the level of intervention is different. Existential therapy, a type of talking therapy, is a largely verbal intervention where the change happens first within the individual – their thinking, feeling and behaving. The rationale for this is that this intrapsychic change can lead to behavioural change that will also lead to positive changes in their social and physical environment. In contrast, the first change when travelling is in one's physical and social environment, which then leads to intrapsychic change. Though these mechanisms are all interconnected and work in multidirectional ways, this different level of intervention is worth exploring as they may vary in levels of effectiveness for different populations or situations. It could further inform or help integrate existential therapy with new developments within the social prescription space (Kilgarriff-Foster & O'Cathain, 2015), which aims to positively impact mental wellbeing through changes in the social and physical environment. This is not to suggest that long-term travel can be offered as a form of therapeutic intervention per se, but that by studying the underlying psychological mechanisms of travel that inform positive psychological change for those experiencing existential crisis, one could adapt and transfer these learnings into tools to inform therapeutic interventions that is made available to a greater number of people. This ambition is also aligned with the Counselling Psychology ethos of equality and diversity (Douglas et al., 2016).

1.6. Chapter summary and research questions

A review of the current literature on the role of travel in overcoming existential crisis has highlighted significant gaps in the psychological understanding of this experience. Previous research has focused mainly on a type of travel, such as backpacking (Paris & Teye, 2010), volunteering (Meneghini, 2016) or student exchange programmes (Brown, 2009), rather than focusing on the often-shared underlying purpose of travel, such as for the purpose of experiencing authenticity, rebuilding meaning or overcoming anxiety. Moreover, more empirical work is needed to unpack what these concepts mean to people and how the experience of travel informs this existential process. A study examining the lived experience of travel after the experience of an existential crisis could shed new light on how travel can aid this existential quest. Thus, the main research questions are:

1. What is people's lived experience of travel after an existential crisis?
2. How do people who have travelled in response to an existential crisis make sense of their experiences, particularly in relation to working through existential crisis?

Chapter 2: Methodology

2.1. Chapter overview

In this chapter, I will first outline the research rationale behind the choice of design and methodology. The chapter will then continue to outline Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), the methodology implemented, whilst highlighting the ontological and epistemological assumptions that are inherent to this approach. Building on this, I will outline the data collection and participant sample. This includes sampling and recruitment, data collection, a participant information summary and the data recording and storage procedure. Next, an overview of the analysis process will be presented. Subsequently, I will make explicit the ethical concerns that the study elicits as well as how they have be managed. Next, I will outline how data validity was ensured whilst undertaking the project. Lastly, the chapter will end with a reflexive discussion of the research design, data collection and analytic process.

2.2. Research rationale

In order to address the research questions outlined at the end of the previous chapter, a qualitative approach is most suitable. This is due to the interest in subjective experience and the desire to capture the richness of this experience and gain a deeper understanding of how the process of meaning-making takes place. The study will consist of one-on-one interviews. Interviews are widely employed qualitative tools that allow the researcher to access people's meanings, motives and self-interpretations (Hopf, 2004). This is because the interview allows space for the participant to emphasise their 'lifeworld' (Gaskell, 2000). It is a more naturalistic method of capturing a participant's perspective and less prescriptive than using predefined categories necessary for surveys or experimental designs. The interviews will be semi-structured, which fall somewhere between fully structured interviews in which all questions are predefined, and unstructured interviews in which the interviewer only predefines the overarching area of investigation (Hopf, 2004). This is suitable because it allows me to gather responses on a particular subject matter, whilst still remaining flexible and able to react to unexpected content brought forth by the interviewee (Barriball & While, 1994).

Given the nature of the research question, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is most suitable (Smith, J. A. et al., 2009). This is because the research question calls for the

exploration of subjective experiences in order to use these 'units' of data to understand the individual sense-making process. This is key as the research aims to explore how the experience of travel, a change in one's physical and social environment, impacts on the individuals process of re-constructing meaning in life after existential crisis. Moreover, due to its idiographic nature and focus on capturing experience, IPA is well-placed to explore specific contained experiences, such as the experience of travel, in a way that does justice to the complexity and novelty of the experience (Smith, J. A. & Osborn, 2003). Lastly, given the existential nature of the research topic, a phenomenological approach is consistent as both theories focus on the lived experience of the individual in creating meaning (Spinelli, 2005).

2.3. Methodology

2.3.1. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

For reasons outlined above, I have chosen Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as the most appropriate methodology for this study. IPA is a qualitative, interview-based approach designed to delve into the richness of people's lived experience in order to gain an understanding of how individuals make sense of their personal and social worlds (Larkin & Thompson, 2011; Smith, J. A. & Osborn, 2003). It rests on three key pillars: phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography (Smith, J. A. et al., 2009). The first pillar purports phenomenologically capturing a detailed description of lived experience as key to new knowledge creation. It requires the researcher to set aside previous knowledge to obtain data that is descriptive and as close as possible to the essence of participants' experiences (Smith, J. A., 2004). The second pillar, hermeneutics, highlights the importance of interpretative meaning-making, a process involving both the participant and the researcher, which is key to making sense of the lived experience one is capturing. The last pillar refers to IPA being idiographic in its approach, which means that it aims to capture knowledge that is unique to each individuals' experience, and not only use this data as part of a larger more general whole. To achieve these principles, IPA uses open explorative questions to facilitate in-depth interviews with a small homogeneous sample of participants (Smith, J. A. & Osborn, 2003). During the interview, participants are encouraged to talk about their experience of the phenomenon in question, in this case the experience of travel after existential crisis.

The value of such an approach to knowledge production is based on phenomenology, a philosophical movement started by Husserl in the 20th Century, which argued that scientific enquiry should be based on capturing and investigating direct and concrete experience

(Husserl, 1936). Phenomenology rejects the notion of cartesian dualism, the idea that mind and body are two separate entities, and that reality is something that exists 'out there', entirely separate from individuals (Koch, 1996). Instead, Husserl (1936) purported the idea of a 'lifeworld', the world of experience inhabited by conscious beings. For him, knowledge could be obtained by recording the essence of conscious experience that is received through our senses when interacting with the external world prior to any act of meaning making through thoughts, reflection or interpretation (Langdridge, 2007). To achieve this, Husserl developed a technique called the phenomenological reduction process. This process includes the method of 'epoche' or 'bracketing' which involves setting aside all previous knowledge, biases and assumptions in order to capture the essence of a phenomenon (Schmitt, 1959). Furthermore, it includes the process of 'horizontalization', whereby everything that is recorded is given equal value and importance. This 'phenomenological attitude' allows one to capture the properties of a phenomenon purely in how it presents itself to consciousness. This is fundamentally different from the 'natural attitude', one that is more evaluative and informed by previous knowledge, which people use to make sense of the familiar world they see on an everyday basis (Smith, J. A. et al., 2009).

However, although IPA purports that the researcher should set aside any preconceived notions of the phenomenon in question, it also believes that it is not possible to fully bracket out all of the researcher's pre-existing knowledge, either during the interview or the analytic process (Larkin et al., 2006). In this sense, IPA deviates from Husserl's ambition to obtain knowledge that transcends the individual and thereby circumvent any biases that could impact scientific enquiry. Instead, IPA draws on later phenomenological work that questioned whether knowledge could be obtained without interpretation. Heidegger (1927a), who had trained under Husserl, viewed humans as inseparably situated in the world and that any knowledge or understanding produced cannot come from nowhere, but is situated within a particular context. This context is historical and made up of relationships with others and the wider social and cultural world (Larkin & Thompson, 2012). Heidegger (1927b) termed this 'pre-understanding' and argued that this can never be made fully explicit. He uses the German word Dasein (being there) to denote that Being, what is and exists in the world, is always being-in-the-world. As such, he argued that description itself is an interpretative process. IPA applies Heidegger's ideas, as well as ideas of other philosophers who have expanded specific aspects of human being-in-the-world. This includes Merleau-Ponty (1962), who built on this theory by drawing particular attention to our embodied selves, and the role of the body in meaning-making, as well as Gadamer (2004), who further developed the idea that language is the universal medium through which understanding occurs and that therefore the two are inextricably linked.

This idea of the situatedness of people and meaning has implications for IPA research, both in what needs to be captured during data collection as well as in how the researcher interprets the data across interviews. Recognising the importance of the context within which the phenomenon in question is embedded explains the importance IPA bestows on detailed descriptions of experience, and all the personal, interpersonal, social and cultural practices and symbols from which a multitude of meanings can be extracted (Smith, J. A., 2004). Furthermore, recognising the inevitability of the researcher's own personal world view in continually co-constructing meaning explains the importance of moving back and forth between the data, to extract meanings at different levels of analysis. Furthermore, it provides the basis for the existence of a 'double hermeneutic': a process by which the researcher aims to make sense of the participant's sense-making process (Smith, J. A. & Osborn, 2003). Lastly, recognising the impact of the researcher's world view on the research process highlights the importance of reflexivity throughout the research process, which is another key aspect of conducting IPA research (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014) that will be presented towards the end of this chapter.

2.3.2. Ontological position

A researcher's ontological position refers to the position they take on the nature of reality, and the nature of what exists. Where one stands can be described as running along a continuum, with realism on one end, and relativism on the other. A realist ontology views the nature of reality as something objective and singular that can be perceived and measured independently from human beliefs, perceptions and constructions (Smith, B. & Ceusters, 2010). On the other end of the spectrum, relativism purports the idea that reality is not singular, but that multiple realities exist and that these are the results of social constructions, differences in human experience and based on alternative human interpretations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008).

The study presented here draws on a critical realist ontology. This aligns with my personal beliefs about the nature of reality, as it states that there is a real external reality that exists and that is not solely constructed by human perceptions and constructions, but also argues that this reality is created by differing subjective interpretations (Gorski, 2013). I believe that although there are elements of reality that are external to human perception, there are also social, psychological, cultural and historical factors that are integral components of this reality (Houston, 2001; Lincoln & Denzin, 2003). I find these arguments compelling, particularly in light of the phenomenon I am interested in studying: the experience of travel and how it informs a person's experience of living after an existential crisis. This is because critical realism as an ontology accepts that there are real external factors that inform our understanding of reality

(such as the notion of moving geographical location within time and space), but that individual and social constructions, such as language or beliefs, are very much constituent elements of this reality (such as the way in which existential crisis is experienced and navigated). Therefore, the reality of the experience of existential crisis after travel is not singular but instead multiple (Finlay, 2006).

Lastly, this ontological position is also aligned with IPA. This is because, as outlined above, IPA is steeped in a philosophical tradition that aimed to establish a different understanding of the nature of reality. This points to a particular understanding of ontology, the nature of being. IPA builds on the ideas of Heidegger (1927b) in that all being is situated and cannot be extracted from its context, and thereby rejects a purely realist ontology that there is a reality out there that can be accessed via objective empirical measures.

2.3.3. Epistemological position

Beyond the philosophical underpinnings of a researcher's ontological stance, one's epistemological position is also important. Epistemology refers to one's beliefs about the nature of knowledge, and how one gains and makes sense of knowledge. As research is about contributing new knowledge, the way one thinks about this knowledge must be explicated.

My epistemological stance is interpretative. Interpretivism is based on the notion that the researcher, with their specific values, ideas and experiences, is part of the research and cannot be removed or disregarded from the process. As such, there can be no separation between subject and object (Willis, 2007). Furthermore, it argues that knowledge is negotiated through dialogue between individual researchers and research participants, all of whom are situated within a particular social, cultural and historical context (Eatough & Smith, 2017). As such, there is no one single idea of truth or knowledge (Gergen, 2015).

This epistemological stance is aligned with IPA because IPA believes knowledge is acquired by accepting and embracing the context within which the researcher and the research subject are embedded, and that the subjectivity of both the participant and the researcher are key in uncovering meaningful knowledge. It does not aim to capture an objective truth, but to gain a detailed view of participants' subjective experience and, through the process of interpretation, make sense of their personal world view in a way that is meaningful (Smith, J. A. & Osborn, 1999). It rejects a purely realist paradigm which believes universal and object truth can be accessed because it believes knowledge to be the product of how people interpret that which they experience (Langdridge, 2007).

2.4. Data collection and participant sample

2.4.1. Participant inclusion criteria

In order to answer the research questions and adhere to ethical guidelines, participants needed to meet a number of inclusion criteria. Firstly, the study only recruited adults (18 years old or above) who self-identified with having experienced existential crisis and consequently engaged in travel. This was based on a definition I provided in the recruitment ad (Appendix A), which described an existential crisis as "as a crisis of living that makes one question the very basis of one's life and its meaning. Examples of such a crisis include but are not limited to: A career crisis, an identity crisis, a breakdown of an important relationship, bereavement, a life changing illness, a near death experience". This lay definition was chosen as it aligned with the academic definition outlined in the Literature Review (Chapter 1), but was more tangible, accessible and relatable.

As stated within the literature review, travel was defined as the act of purposively changing location and taking timeout from one's usual everyday routine. In the context of existential crisis, taking time out from one's usual everyday routine, meant that travel took participants away from the source of their existential crisis. Upon completion of the literature review, the act of creating geographical distance from the external factors that played a part in creating existential crisis was felt to be significant and therefore defined as part of the inclusion criteria. However, there did not seem to be a minimum or maximum length of time that needed to be adhered to in order to impact people's sense of existential authenticity, wellbeing or growth. Therefore, no length of travel period was defined.

There was no upper age restriction as the experience being investigated was not deemed age dependent. Instead, it is more important that participants were able and willing to talk about their experience. With regards to exclusion criteria, anyone under the age of 18 was not able to take part in the study. By using the word travel, rather than holiday, the aim was to reach people who have purposively taken an extensive timeout from their usual everyday routine to experience something new and different, rather than those who have taken a shorter break solely for the purpose of respite.

2.4.2. Participant recruitment

The study aimed to recruit six to eight participants for interview. This number is in line with IPA, which purports that a small number of homogenous participants should be studied in order to capture the richness and depth of an experience (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Participants were recruited using purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling strategy by which the researcher exercises her own judgement to select appropriate participants (Etikan, 2016). This strategy allows information-rich cases related to the phenomenon being studied, in this case the experience of travel after existential crisis, to be selected (Palinkas et al., 2015). A number of approaches were taken in order to recruit participants. First, my own personal networks were approached in order to ascertain whether they knew anyone who might be eligible and interested in participating in the study. These people were approached directly and with the use of a recruitment flyer (Appendix A). However, the study only interviewed people I did not previously know. This was done in order to ensure there were no dual relationships that could impact the validity of the research. Furthermore, it ensured that the entirety of their experience was captured in the interview as it ruled out the possibility of their being previously shared knowledge and assumptions that remained unverbalised. Moreover, the criticality of confidentiality was reiterated to these participants, both during the screening call and before the start of the interview, as knowing people in common may have made them more tentative to openly share their full experience with me. Second, 'gate keepers' of communities of people who travel, such as hosts of online forums like Facebook groups and blogs, were targeted and asked to share the recruitment flyer with their networks. Lastly, snowball sampling, a sampling technique where existing participants recruit future participants from their personal networks (Noy, 2008), was implemented. This is a suitable strategy as people who have gone travelling are likely to be linked into a community of like-minded people, such as those they met whilst travelling. All participants were interviewed online over Zoom. This had the benefit of reaching participants I may not otherwise have been able to access due to their geographical location. However, it also limits the sample to people who have access to the necessary technical resources. These sampling benefits and limitations will be considered in the interpretation of the results.

2.4.3. Data collection

Interviews took place between September and October 2021 and lasted between 45 and 90 minutes each. Participants were interviewed online using the City University Zoom account, a secure online platform. This was due to the travel and meeting restrictions imposed in response to the COVID-19 crisis during the time of data collection. Before agreeing to participate, participants were given the opportunity to ask questions via a screening call, online

meeting or email exchange. Before the interview, at least one week prior, participants were emailed a participant information sheet (Appendix B). The consent form (Appendix C) was also sent, at least 48 hours before the interview, and was signed by both the participant and myself prior to the interview. Before the interview could commence, participants had to return a signed copy of the consent form.

Ten people initially responded to the recruitment flyer (Appendix A). Of these ten, two dropped out as they did not reply after I contacted them in response to their initial email. One participant agreed to a screening call during which we realised she did not identify with the experience that I was studying. We therefore mutually agreed not to go ahead with the interview. This left seven participants who participated in the study. Of these seven, six came across the recruitment flyer through connections with personal networks. The flyer was either shared with them directly or posted on their social media. One participant came across the recruitment flyer through an online forum on Facebook.

During the interview, I was guided by a number of predefined questions, based on a preliminary reading of the literature. This is in line with a semi-structured interview method. A copy of the preliminary interview schedule can be found in Appendix D. Before starting data collection, these questions were shown to someone who met the inclusion criteria for the study. This allowed me to softy pilot the questions and refine any questions that are deemed unclear or irrelevant. This encounter was not a formal interview and the data is not included in the analysis.

The interview schedule is composed of open questions to allow participants the space to explore their own experiences and attitudes. The questions pertain to issues relating to their experience of existential crisis, travel as well as their experience returning from travelling. The interview began by asking more experiential questions, in order to build rapport, and eased into more reflective and cognitively difficult questions. After the interview ended, participants completed a short questionnaire (Appendix E) to capture some key demographic details. Subsequently, participants were thanked and provided with a debrief information sheet (Appendix F) to explain a bit more about the study and provide them with necessary contact information. Participants were asked if they have any questions and encouraged to contact me if any questions or concerns arose after the interview. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed by myself.

2.4.4. Participant summary

The study presented in this thesis describes the experience of seven adults who self-identify as having experienced existential crisis and subsequently gone travelling. Participant demographics were captured using the questionnaire outlined above (Appendix E). Participants ranged between the ages of 26 and 55, with six of seven participants falling within the 25-35 age bracket. Of the seven participants, one was male and six were female. Just over half the participants, four of seven, were British. The remaining three were Polish, Greek and Mexican. The vast majority, six of seven, identified as ethnically White, and one female identified as Latin. All seven participants were university educated, with a minimum of an undergraduate degree. Lastly, the sample was largely non-religious, with only one participant identifying as Christian, and one participant preferring not to say. These demographics are detailed in Table 2.1. below. The rationale for capturing participant demographics, such as age, gender, ethnicity and nationality, was to gain a better understanding of the voices and experiences that were being captured in this research. Highest qualification and occupation were captured as a way of accessing socio-economic status of participants, to better understand the role of privilege in this experience. Lastly, religion was captured to better access the religious and spiritual impact that travel could have potentially had on participants. To maintain participant anonymity, all participants have been given pseudonyms, and all other personal identifying information has been modified or omitted.

Table 2.1.
Participant demographics

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Nationality	Ethnic group	Highest qualification	Occupation	Religion
James	Male	33	British	White British	Undergraduate degree	Commercial manager	Prefer not to say
Maria	Female	26	Mexican	Latin	Undergraduate degree	Software engineer	No religion
Charlotte	Female	29	British	White British	Undergraduate degree	Fulltime student	No religion

Emilia	Female	30	Greek	White European	Postgraduate degree	Researcher	No religion
Paulina	Female	31	Polish	White European	Postgraduate degree	Data scientist	No religion
Georgina	Female	34	British/South African	White British	Postgraduate degree	Counselling psychologist	No religion
Nicola	Female	55	British	White British	Undergraduate degree	Communications officer	Christian

Beyond demographic details, a number of key details about their existential crisis and travel experience was captured. This was done through a combination of the questionnaire (Appendix E) and the interview itself. All participants described a particular trigger that played an integral role in their existential crisis and their decision to travel. For the majority of participants, five of seven, this was the end of a romantic relationship. The second most common reason, stated by three of the participants, was career dissatisfaction akin to burnout. However, it is important to note this was not seen as the only reason for existential crisis, and most reported a general sense of alienation and dissatisfaction with their everyday life before travelling. With regards to travel region, the participants interviewed covered four of seven continents, having travelled to North and Latin American, Europe, Africa, the Middle East and Asia. With regards to travel duration, there were large differences in the sample, ranging from five days to 20 years abroad. However, the majority, five of seven, travelled between two and 18 months. Lastly, six of the seven participants had completed their travelling at the time of interview, with only one participant having her interview from where she was currently travelling. These details are presented in Table 2.2. below. The heterogeneity of the sample with regard to travel duration, as well as differences between those who have finished travelling and those who have not, will be reflected on in the discussion in order to evaluate how this impacted the findings.

Table 2.2.

Summary of participants' travel experience

Pseudonym	Existential crisis trigger/driver	Travel region	Travel length	Travel status
James	Career dissatisfaction	Asia	6 months	Finished travelling
Maria	Relationship breakdown	Latin America	6 months	Still travelling
Charlotte	Relationship breakdown	North America	1.5 years	Finished travelling
Emilia	Relationship breakdown	Europe	5 days	Finished travelling
Paulina	Career dissatisfaction and relationship breakdown	Middle East	2 months	Finished travelling
Georgina	Relationship breakdown	Africa	4 months	Finished travelling
Nicola	Career dissatisfaction	Africa	20 years	Finished travelling

2.4.5. Data recording and storage procedure

City, University of London is the sponsor and the data controller of this study. This means that they are responsible for looking after the information and using it properly. In order to adhere with City, University of London (2020) research guidelines, the following data recording and storage policies have been followed. Firstly, data was collected using the City University Zoom account. This ensured that the data was sufficiently encrypted and that virtual meeting rooms

were password protected and safe from virtual intrusion. The data was also recorded using the Zoom account, ensuring that the audio data and Zoom transcript are encrypted and securely stored on the cloud. This audio and textual data, along with the questionnaire data that was gathered, was then relocated and stored on a password protected laptop. All data was anonymised and stored separately from any personal identifiers or contact details. As the principal researcher, I am the only person who has had access to any identifiable information or contact details. Anonymised data files, such as interview transcripts, were printed out for the analysis. These copies were stored in a secure filing cabinet to which I was the only person who had access, and were disposed of as soon as the analysis was completed. Any elements of the data, such as direct quotes, which are part of the write up of the study have of course been anonymised. Upon completion of the research requirements, the audio data will be destroyed. Anonymised interview transcripts will be stored for another 10 years. After the 10-year period has passed, this data too will be destroyed. Destroying data refers to all electronic files being moved to trash and the trash emptied, and any remaining paper files being shredded and disposed of.

2.5. Data Analysis

Rather than a preconceived theory or idea, the starting point for IPA is the participants' subjective lived experience. The data is idiographic and requires the researcher to gain an intimate familiarity with each individual interview, working on both descriptive and interpretive levels of analysis (Smith et al., 1999). To complete this process, Smith et al. (2009) clearly outlined a six-step process, which I followed in order to ensure analytic rigour.

The first step of the analytic procedure was data immersion. This was done by reading through the first transcript a number of times. In my case, this data immersion started by listening to the transcript very slowly and transcribing the first interview. After transcription, the transcript was re-read a number of times. This allowed me to regain in-depth familiarity with the interview and the life-world of the participant. At this stage, I also noted down any reflections and thoughts that were coming up for me in my research diary (Willig, 2001).

The second step is the initial noting phase, which Smith et al. (2009) describe as the most time-consuming part of the analysis and, in my experience, made up the bulk of the analysis procedure. Here, I made exploratory comments in the right-hand margin of the transcript in order to capture anything that struck me as interesting, relevant or significant. This allowed

me to capture the salient aspects of the data and make connections between different thoughts and feelings expressed by the participant. I then separated these notes into three different categories, as suggested by Smith et al. (2009). These three categories are: descriptive, conceptual and linguistic. Descriptive comments are those closest to the text and experience of the participant. Conceptual comments allow the researcher to identify and note down overarching patterns across the interview. Lastly, linguistic comments pay special attention to how language (i.e. metaphors, figurative speech, turns of phrase) is used to communicate content and meaning. As my analysis was completed by hand, I used three different colours (pink, blue and green) to clearly represented and differentiate these three different categories of comment. An example of an analysed transcript can be seen in Appendix G.

Having read the interview a number of times, and based on these notes in the right-hand margin, the third step is to record the emerging themes[2]. I first recorded these in the left-hand side margin of the first transcript, as shown in Appendix G. Here, the aim was to condense the data by decreasing the level of detail without losing its richness and complexity. The purpose of the emergent theme is to integrate the participants experience with my own interpretation, which is based on looking across the interview as a whole. My choice of emerging themes was led by the themes' frequency of occurrence, relevance to the research question and significance to the participant. These parameters allowed me to capture both collective and shared themes, as well as individual variations within the data. The emergent themes were usually denoted as a brief statement or phrase.

The fourth step is to copy these emergent themes on to a separate paper in chronological order. Here, I copied by handwritten notes into a digital document. This was done as this next step involved moving around all the emergent themes in order to group them together in meaningful ways, aggregating and clustering them to create superordinate themes and subthemes. This was much easier to do digitally rather than by hand. To determine the groupings, I was guided by the recommendations of Smith et al. (2009). These include abstraction (naturally clustering themes), subsumption (identifying higher-order ranking

[2] It is important to note that some of the terminology used to describe IPA's analytic process has recently changed (Smith et al., 2022). For example, 'emergent themes' are now referred to as 'experiential statements'. However, as my analysis process was already underway before this change, I decided to stick to the former terminology in order to remain consistent.

themes), contextualisation (themes linked by contextual factors and events), polarization (taking note of opposing themes) and numeration (frequency of theme as part indication of significance). This allowed me to get a sense of the phenomenon that could be identified as underlying the participant's lived experience. Once this process had been completed, the superordinate and subthemes were copied into a digital table, along with an illustrative quote. This document became the basis of the master table of themes, which can be seen in Appendix H.

Having completed the analysis for the first interview, the fifth step involved moving on to the six remaining interview transcripts and repeating steps one to four as outlined above. Due to the idiosyncratic nature of IPA and the importance it bestows on capturing everyone's experience as its own meaningful entity (Smith et al., 2009), I was cognisant of any tendency I had to look for emergent themes across the different interviews. I aimed to bracket out what had emerged from previously analysed transcripts as much as possible, and tried to represent the emergent superordinate themes and subthemes of each transcript based solely on how they came through within the individual interview.

The final step, step six, aims to bring everything together by looking across the data from all seven cases. Here, the previously kept separate data files for each interview transcript are brought together by looking for connections and themes that mirror the overall experience of the participants. This process informs the master table of themes, and can be seen in Appendix H. To do this, all the superordinate and subthemes from each interview were printed out and cut up so that I could manually move them around and group them together in a way that did justice to both the participants' lived experiences and the phenomenon being investigated. Here, again, the five grouping strategies outlined by Smith et al. (2009) were followed. A snapshot of this process can be seen in Appendix I. Once this process had been completed, a master table of themes was updated to include the themes from across all seven interviews. As can be seen in Appendix H, it resulted in four superordinate themes, each of which consisted of two to four subthemes. This master table of themes provides the foundation of the analysis chapter (Chapter 3) of this thesis.

2.6. Ethical considerations

Data collection began once ethical approval had been granted by the Psychology Department's Ethics Committee at City, University of London. Ethical approval was granted

under reference number ETH1920-1827. The ethics application complies with British Psychological Society (2014) and Health and Care Professionals Council (2016) research ethics guidelines. The study was identified as low risk as participants will be adults recruited from non-clinical populations and the topic being studied was deemed to not be highly sensitive or likely to cause harm. Nevertheless, a number of ethical considerations must be made explicit and managed throughout the research process.

The first is in relation to gaining informed consent from participants. Written informed consent was given by all participants before the research interview. This means that they were told about the nature of the study and the types of experiences that they will be asked about. Consent was also be provided on the basis of anonymity, confidentiality and the ability to withdraw or withhold data at any point during and after the interview. Anonymity and confidentiality continue to be upheld by adhering to the data recording and storage procedures outlined above. These are in line with the City, University of London (2020) research guidelines. Furthermore, I ensured that interviews took place in a private space, free from virtual or physical intrusion by others. Participants were also made aware of the importance of being in a private physical space in order to maintain confidentiality and no instances of intrusion occurred across the seven interviews.

The interviews were conducted with individuals who were not currently experiencing existential crisis. Therefore, there was less risk of causing distress due to the temporal distance between their experience of crisis and participation in the study. Furthermore, the interviews focused on people's experience of travel after existential crisis, thereby focusing on the more positive aspects of the experience. Nevertheless, the interview had the potential to touch on some sensitive issues for participants and as such, a number of measures were implemented to mitigate potential distress. Firstly, participants were given ample information about the study in advance, and the opportunity to ask questions about what participation would involve and asked whether they needed any other special measures to ensure they felt comfortable partaking. Secondly, when required, participants were provided with contact details of relevant services that can provide counselling and support. Thirdly, participants were encouraged to voice any distress they may experience during the interview and explicitly told that it is fine to take a break or stop the interview altogether, if required, at any point. These explicit reminders of participants' rights, along with a sensitive interview manner, are important in order to redress the inherent power imbalance which characterizes the relationship between interviewer and interviewee (Karnieli-Miller et al., 2009). Finally, participants were debriefed, asked how they found the interview and asked if they have any final questions. These measures, along with the appropriate use of supervision and therapy to protect and support

myself as the researcher, enabled appropriate safeguarding of all those involved in the research process.

2.7. Data validity

In order to ensure the quality of the research findings, data validity is key. Data validity refers to how accurately a research method captures what which it intends to. Traditional measures of validity were designed to ensure quality data within a quantitative paradigm was being attained. This included external validity, the level of generalisability of findings, and internal validity, the extent to which findings accurately captured a cause-and-effect relationship (Field, 2018). However, these measures of quality are not fit for the purpose of evaluating good qualitative research. This is due to ontological and epistemological differences, as quantitative methodologies ascribe to a positivist tradition that sees knowledge as absolute and out there in the world and the researcher as an objective measure of that knowledge. This is different to qualitative research, which embraces the subjectivity of the researcher and does not aim to be generalisable. Instead, qualitative research emphasises the importance of transferability, the idea that findings can be applicable to other contexts, times and populations beyond the one's being studied. Moreover, qualitative research does not aim to control for confounding variables to assess causality. Therefore, standard statistical analyses that have been developed to test both internal and external validity are not of use within the qualitative paradigm (Gaskell & Bauer, 2000). In an attempt to find more appropriate validity measures for qualitative research, Yardley (2000) developed a framework that outlines four core elements. These guided me throughout my research process and will therefore be briefly outlined here.

The first element is sensitivity to context. This refers to needing to have an understanding of the sociocultural context within which the subject of study is embedded, as well as its relevance to the literature and the participant. In the case of travel after existential crisis, an extensive review of the literature was conducted in such a way that sociocultural factors were accounted for. By applying IPA, an idiographic analysis strategy, this sensitivity also informed the interview questions and were held in mind whilst conducting the interview as well as the analysis. Lastly, sensitivity to context was at the fore whilst writing the discussion, during which the results were made sense of in the context of the existing literature.

The second element is commitment and rigour. These qualities must be maintained throughout the research process and include engagement with the research topic, thorough and systematic data collection, immersion in the data and in-depth analysis (Yardley, 2000). One way to ensure this is through sufficient methodological preparation. This includes training and understanding of complex research skills, both those specific to IPA as well as more general interview skills. This was ensured by my engagement with the research modules provided by City University, independent study and feedback from research supervision. Furthermore, rigour was displayed through careful selection of participants based on clear inclusion criteria and detailed probing. Lastly, rigour was established through deep immersion into the idiographic data over multiple time periods, in order to ensure the analysis did justice to both the descriptive and interpretative processes.

The third element is transparency and coherence. Transparency refers to the researcher's commitment to record each step of the research process and providing a compelling rationale for their methodological decisions. This is linked to a need for coherence, as the different methodologies and research processes engaged with must be aligned in order to ensure high quality research (Yardley, 2000). This methodology chapter aims to satisfy this condition by outlining the rationale behind research decisions, as well as carefully delineate the ontological and epistemological assumptions upon which they are built. According to Smith et al. (2009) it is also important to extensively document all parts of the research process. Particular attention was paid to this when it came to the analysis and writing up process. Here, adequate use of research supervision was key. Furthermore, I made an active effort to think reflexively throughout the research process to ensure transparency was upheld.

Lastly, the fourth of the core elements is impact and importance (Yardley, 2000). This demonstrates a commitment not only to knowledge seeking, but also to seeking knowledge that has an impact and informs something that is of importance. For this study, the hope is that it will foster a greater understanding of the experience and psychological effects of travel in our world today, as well as shed light on how meaning is re-constructed by those who are working through an existential crisis. This is important to understand as creating meaning in life is of fundamental importance to human wellbeing (Thoits, 2011). A more detailed outline of the impact and importance of this study will be presented in the Discussion Chapter (Chapter 4).

2.8. Reflexivity

My own experience and interest in travel as a way of learning about the world and my place within it is what has led me to want to explore this topic further. This will no doubt have informed my perspective on and interpretation of the data. Therefore, throughout this research process, I have made an effort to 'bracket' any assumptions I may have about this topic. Do to this, I had to first become aware of their content. The most evident preconception I have is that travel can provide some form of therapeutic function to those who have gone through a form of existential crisis. This is based on my own experiencing of crisis and my turn to travel to gain new experiences that allowed me to make new meaningful connections with the social and physical world around me. This assumption had to be suspended during the interview as participants may have had a different experience. For example, some may have had a similar expectation of travel but found their actual experience to be quite different. Furthermore, people's experiences are likely to be more complex and not solely positive and the opportunity to explore this had to be reflected in the line of interview questioning. Moreover, travel is likely to have impacted participants in very different ways to how it impacted me. To ensure that prior beliefs did not hinder participants from fully exploring their experiences or led to a lacking interpretation, I kept a reflective research diary in which I noted my own feelings and thoughts about the research.

As a reflexive researcher, I must also consider the impact of my presence and the research context on the participant. For example, given my interest in the topic, participants may have assumed my positive attitude towards travel and this may have impacted the way they present their own experiences. Furthermore, I needed to think about the participants' experience of the artificial nature of the online research encounter. In particular, remote interviewing may have had an impact on relational factors such as trust and rapport between researcher and participant. It could, for example, have made it more difficult for participants to feel at ease in my presense and less willing to explore experiences they worried about for fear it would be perceived negatively. This is called social desirability bias and is something one must always be aware of in research (Grimm, 2010). However, the online environment may also have the opposite effect, allowing participants to be more open than they would be face-to-face due to the 'disinhibition effect' (Suler, 2004): the idea that social inhibitions are loosened when interacting online. In order to gauge these potential influences, I ensured I received feedback from participants after the interview, which I recorded in my research diary and took into account whilst interpreting my findings.

Lastly, I was mindful of the potential privilege with which this research topic is imbued. The idea of being able to leave to go to another place to pursue a more personally meaningful existence is not something everyone would have the opportunity to do. Sufficient access to resources is required. As such, it may be that participants come from a more socio-economically privileged background, and that this experience of the world may give a very different understanding of how meaning in life is formed and experienced. This will be to the fore when interpreting the results. Furthermore, as one of the aims of Counselling Psychology and of valid qualitative research is to engage in important and impactful work that addresses issues of social justice (Cooper, 2009; Yardley, 2000), an effort must also be made to try and apply the findings in a way that they can be of use to all people, not just those with a significant amount of socio-economic privilege.

Chapter 3: Analysis

3.1. Chapter overview

This chapter presents the result of the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) of the seven interviews recorded for this research project. The chapter will begin by giving a brief overview of the four superordinate themes and twelve subthemes that emerged from the analysis process. These themes will then each be presented in turn to give a detailed account of participants' lived experiences of travel after existential crisis. Here, direct quotes, with their corresponding participant pseudonym and line number, have been included in the analysis to amplify participant voices and ensure transparency. Given the sheer volume of interview data, the quotes chosen were based on the ones that best captured the sum of participants' experiences, as well as best illustrated the emerging subtheme. This technique, combined with an interpretative stance, provide a richer understanding of participants lived experience of travel after existential crisis. Lastly, the prevalence of each theme will also be reported, as not all superordinate themes and subthemes were mentioned by all participants. Although prevalence is not necessarily synonymous with significance, the purpose of including this measure is to give a clearer and more transparent account of the overall interview data.

3.2. Overview of superordinate themes and subthemes

Figure 3.1. below gives an overview of the four superordinate themes with their corresponding subthemes. The four superordinate themes are written in bold and connected to the central topic depicted in the middle of the diagram by thick black lines. The titles of these superordinate themes were created using my words in order to best capture the broader themes of the interviews. The subthemes are connected to their corresponding superordinate themes with thin black lines. The titles of these subthemes were created using the participants own words, in order to give a flavour for the subtheme whilst staying as close to the data as possible. The content of each superordinate theme and subtheme will be outlined in the remainder of this chapter.

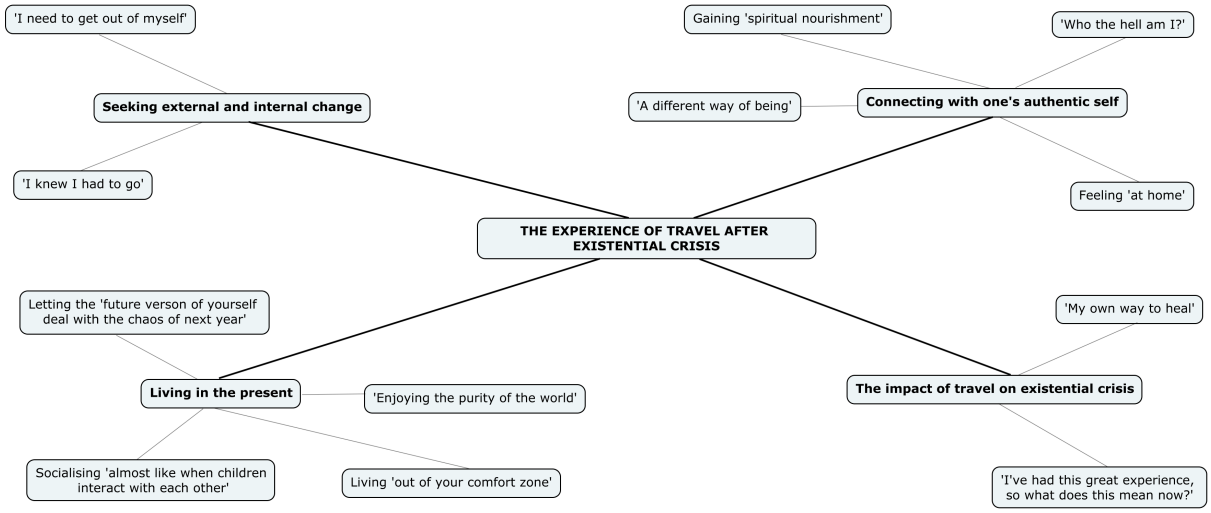


Figure 3.1. Superordinate themes and subthemes

3.3. Superordinate Theme I: Seeking external and internal change

Superordinate theme I, which was mentioned by all seven participants, explores each individual's desire for external and internal change. The theme is divided into two subthemes. Subtheme one, '**I need to get out of myself'** describes participants' experience of travel as a reaction to feelings of crisis as well as being constrained, both internally and externally, by their daily lives. This left them feeling low, and with a lack of meaning and purpose. Subtheme two, **'I knew I had to go'** outlines the sense of intuitive knowing despite fear and uncertainty that participants reported in relation to deciding to go travel. It examines the experience of taking a leap of faith, and embracing the unknown nature of travel in the hope that this will foster a more personally meaningful and enjoyable way of living.

3.3.1. Subtheme one: 'I need to get out of myself'

Of the seven participants, six discussed how travel was motivated by a desire to escape their usual environment as they felt trapped in a mundane routine. For many, this environment was linked to the trigger for their existential crisis, such as a relationship breakdown or career dissatisfaction. However, beyond this single trigger, participants reported their desire for travel as being motivated by a more general feeling of dissatisfaction with their everyday lives. This was linked to feeling dissatisfied and disconnect with their daily lives, as well as a feeling of being trapped and needing to escape the feeling of being externally and internally confined.

For example, Maria's desire for travel meant escaping the hustle and bustle of the city, as well as her daily routine:

> *"it's also part of like the city life I think, just being on the routine, like waking up, going to work, coming back home, work out and sleep and just do it all over again and just not enjoying"* (ll. 154-156)

Her description of her everyday highlights the repetitive, machine-like nature of her life, which left her feeling unhappy. This sentiment was echoed by Paulina, who reported feeling stuck, bored and deflated by her daily routine:

> *"you can get quite bored and stuck in this like repetitive wake up, go to work, go out for dinner, go sleep, like go back to work, that you don't fully enjoy, um, routine and it's just it felt like, yeah, it felt like it was this, this, to the point where you start wondering whether that's all there is to, to this great existence, you know"* (Paulina, ll. 83-88)

The questioning of whether there may be more to 'this great existence' gets to the crux of her existential crisis, that left her not only questioning one aspect of her life, but life in general and what its purpose was.

Beyond the break-up of her relationship, her work also left her feeling unfulfilled:

> *"I always did a good job and everyone said I was, like it's not like it wasn't going well, er, but it's as if you feel a little bit like a cog in the big machine and it doesn't really feel like the sort of, you don't have that sense of like agency in a way"* (Paulina, ll. 200-205)

This quote highlights the desire for agency, to move in different and self-determined ways, rather than having to move as dictated by a 'big machine' like the company she worked for.

This view of home life as mundane and unfitting was also brought up by Nicola:

> *"I knew I had to leave England, I was 34 and I really wanted to get married and all that stuff but I, I realised I had never really wanted to live in Clapham in a semi-detached house going to Sainsbury's, looking after, I kind of realised that somehow wasn't maybe going to make me happy. So I did this other thing"* (Nicola, ll. 112-116)

By picking up on the idea of 'going to Sainsbury's' and living in a 'semi-detached house', she refers to a way that people at home nourish themselves and shelter themselves, thereby fulfilling some of their basic human needs. However, for Nicola, it seems that this way of living is not emotionally nourishing and does not meet her emotional or psychological needs. She continued to describe her home life as 'not real living' (l. 210) and a 'façade' (l. 210). This indicates a lack of connectedness to life at home, a feeling of inauthenticity and mismatch between her needs and wants for life, and the ways of living that were modelled to her at home.

Charlotte referred to travel as escaping her 'bog standard' (l. 321) life at home as a kind of 'enhanced normality' (l.636). Similar to Nicola, this points towards a conceptualisation of travel as somewhere between real and artificial living, perhaps pointing towards a way of living that truly existed, but did not feel truly sustainable or attainable long-term to her. The tourist town she travelled to in Canada was more exciting to her than living 'the same life again and again' (Charlotte, l. 451) in a residential area at home. In Canada, things were less settled and more people moved through the town, which made it feel more fresh and different. She enjoyed immersing herself in this otherness and expressed not understanding how people could want to stay in one place when "there's like a whole world to explore" (Charlotte, l. 484).

The idea of home life as different to life travelling was shared by Georgina. For Georgina, a part of leaving home was a way of escaping her present circumstance and her feeling of stuckness and oppression. She expressed feeling like:

> *"I need to get out of myself. You know, I need to, I need to, it just everything was feeling very stuck, oppressed, estranged and lacking in, in movement and freedom"* (Georgina, ll. 530-533)

Here, Georgina refers to needing to get out of herself, not just her life. This evokes images of a cage that had been internalised by herself, points to needing to escape her current experience of herself, a self that was constructed around living in a certain way and was experiencing crisis.

> *"I wanted something bigger than me, you know, I, I really just craved to be in nature, to be surrounded by the ocean, um, mountains, being able to walk, being able to, to go for swims and have some sunshine, um, it was like a totally different landscape"* (Georgina, ll. 108-112)

This quote illustrates her craving for nature and wanting to connect with something bigger than she had previously. This again evokes imagery of escaping a small cage, in order to go out and be part of something bigger. This is also manifested in the physical environment she craves, longing for vast and open spaces like mountains and the ocean in which she is free to move. She described being surrounded by mountains as "the total opposite" (Georgina, l. 114) to her physical existence in London.

3.3.2. Subtheme two: 'I knew I had to go'

All seven participants reported a shared experience of travel as embracing uncertainty despite fear and trepidation. They expressed not knowing what they were moving towards but knowing they needed to move away from where they currently were. Despite the lack of certainty over what this would look like, it felt intuitively right to them. Although travelling required a leap of faith, the majority of the interviewees had some familiarity with the experience of travel as they had either travelled before or been to the location before. Both Georgina and Emilia returned to their country of origin, although to new places they had not been before. Charlotte, James and Nicola all had previous experience of travelling on the continent they went to. Maria had previously visited the beach location she travelled to in her native Mexico. Paulina had previously travelled extensively, although she did not mention any previous travel to Jordan or the Middle East more generally.

Maria described her feelings of fear and worry at the early stages of her travel:

> *"I didn't know what to expect. Like I was scared at the beginning because I was like, like I have no one here, like if something happens to me like if I get a flat tyre or I don't know, whatever, something happens, like I'm going to be here by myself"* (Maria, ll. 103-107)

Not knowing what to expect highlights the level of uncertainty she felt about travelling. She also refers to the loss of her typical support systems, and questioning whether she would be able to cope without them. This sense of fear was echoed by Georgina, who described the decision to travel as 'difficult' (l. 547) and 'scary' (l.549), not only due to a number of practical work concerns she needed to manage, but also due to not knowing exactly what she should expect or how she would feel. Paulina expressed the strongest sense of fear and anxiety before her trip:

> *"I was really I guess nervous about the trip, especially after literally the whole family was like you should… it started with the grandma and then everyone was like oh my God you're going to die. Er, and then towards the end, towards the end of the preparation I was literally like yeah I might die but I didn't, um, so that, I was, I was very nervous"* (Paulina, ll. 149-156)

Fear of death, of existential annihilation, is a deep-seated fear that Paulina and her family grappled with. Yet despite this fear, she decided to go ahead with her trip. Multiple participants mentioned overcoming their fear due to feelings of intuitively knowing it was the right decision for them at that moment:

> *"But intuitively it just felt that I needed, I, I needed this, a change, despite the fact that I had been through a massive change. It was almost like I was looking for, to connect with that change"* (Georgina, ll. 60-63)

Although not aware of it at the time, upon later reflection Georgina connects making a drastic change like moving geographical location to the dramatic change she had just been through during the breakup of her marriage. She speculates that perhaps by making a large external life change was a way of connecting with the large internal shift she was experiencing.

James described the process of moving towards the unknown through the metaphor of ocean voyage:

> *"you're setting sail on this little boat and it's kind of the Tom Hanks raft, it's, it's far from seaworthy but it'll do, right, it floats. And you're going out there and all you can see is ocean and you, you just have to trust that as you're going you will become better on the water, you don't really know where you're going but you will see land and you'll get to land and then you'll meet some people and you'll have some experiences and it will, you know, you might come across a map and that helps direct you further on your journey"* (James, ll. 293-302)

By using the idea of a raft, James highlights the inherent risk that was part of his travelling experience. However, it also points to the sense of adventure and excitement that is part of what attracts James to travel. The idea of being on the open sea depicts the level of uncertainty and lack of being safely anchored, but also the openness and freedom, that travel involves. It highlights the need for trust and optimism that good will come from the unknown, as well as

faith in himself and others that one will learn and adapt and be able to handle whatever is coming one's way.

Charlotte described previous experience of travel in North America as giving her a taste of travel and sparking her "inner explorer" (Charlotte, l. 37). Charlotte described "feeding that travel part" (Charlotte, ll. 689-690) of herself, giving that part of her attention and nourishment.

> *"I think I was definitely nervous but I think I just had this real kind of innate feeling that everything would just be fine"* (Charlotte, ll.85-87)

This quote highlights the innate sense of optimism and hope that she had in relation to travel. Furthermore, she embraced the uncertainty by keeping an open mind and creating a flexible plan that was open to change. She also expressed not having any expectations as she did not know what was awaiting her. This also put less pressure on the process and allowed things to "unfold quite naturally" (Charlotte, l.93). This shows the benefit of allowing things to be as they are, both internally and externally, and the benefit of this in creating a harmonious and positive experience. This sentiment was echoed by Emilia, who described her decision to travel as one that 'felt right' at the time. This was also the case for Nicola, who stated: "I knew I had to go" (l. 121), even if she did not fully understand why at the time. She reported that one of the nuns she volunteered with described this as her "calling", pointing towards travel as a predetermined and right decision with a greater spiritual purpose.

3.4. Superordinate Theme II: Connecting with one's authentic self

Having previously experienced existential crisis, all seven participants' experience of travel was informed by an experience of reconnecting with their authentic selves. They spent time rediscovering who they were and exploring what they were hoping to experience during their lives. There is a clear sense in the data that the external journey that participants embarked on was mirrored by an internal journey of self-discovery. This section can be broken down into four subthemes. The first subtheme, **'Who the hell am I?'** explores participants desire to gain awareness of their authentic selves through self-reflection. The second subtheme, **'A different way of being'** reports on how participants were able to translate their new ways of thinking into new ways of being and living. It also explores the sense of freedom they craved to be able to react to those authentic selves and to be able to attend to those needs. The third subtheme, **Feeling 'at home'** outlines participants experience of feeling at ease and at home

whilst travelling, finding a place they felt held by and connected to and that gave them a sense of belonging. Lastly, the fourth subtheme, **Gaining** '**spiritual nourishment'** delineates the way in which travel made space for connection with one's spiritual self, as well as the impact of this development on participants.

3.4.1. Subtheme one: 'Who the hell am I?'

Within this theme, four participants spoke about authentic self-connection through the experience of self-discovery and reflection. They reported travel fostering experiences that made them reflect on their own identity as well the meaning and purpose they wanted to ascribe to their lives. They attributed this process to travel allowing them to get away from their usual environments, be exposed to new ways of living, both of which allowed them to make more self-determined choices.

For example, James engaged with the process of self-discovery overtly, as he explained going through a written exercise with his friend and fellow traveller to try and capture *"who am I, who the hell am I?"* and *"who do I want to be, how do I want to live and how am I going to get there"* (James, ll. 361-372). These quotes show the systematic way in which James attempted to reflect, with a particular emphasis on uncovering "*who the hell*" he is. This is likely to be linked to the existential crisis triggered by feelings of dissatisfaction and alienation at work:

> *"I'd been a company man for four years which had been great fun but, you know … they changed everything about me. It was even the way I'm speaking and my views on certain things were just, it's like kind of I'm not controlling the puppet strings here" (James, ll. 372-376)*

This quote demonstrates how disconnected James felt to his sense of self, and the lack of control he felt over his own identity and how he operated in the world. Changing how he spoke, as well as his views indicates a deep sense of alienation from his authentic self that left him feeling confused and internally ill at ease.

Maria expressed a similar desire to want to reconnect with her authentic self:

> *"… just to try to find out what I wanted and (pause) who, like who, to like to try to find myself again"* (ll. 36-37)

Maria describes the self as something to be found, to be uncovered. Furthermore, through her use of the word 'again' she expresses that this self was something that she previous had but had since gone missing. However, it is important to note that Maria also talks about finding out who she is 'now'. This shows a desire to find her current self for the first time, a self that has evolved and is different to her previous self.

Finding herself involved different facets for Maria, including the desire to shift her attitude away from being a planner and instead focus on what she enjoys. This points to a different way of engaging with the world. Another important shift is in her thinking about future career ambitions:

> *"… for example my parents owned their own company so for some reason I felt like I wanted to do that too . . . And now I just feel that that has changed a lot, that I don't need to own a company and I don't even know if I want to own my own company. Um, if that's maybe like a wish or a belief that I just got from like living with my parents or just following my parents' footsteps, but I feel like it's not really what I want to do… And it's like a huge step because for as long as I can remember I wanted to own my own company"* (ll. 613-624)

Here, Maria describes the inevitable impact of other people's teachings and expectations on her. In particular, primary relationships such as those with parents. By getting away from her usual social environment, it seems that Maria is able to gain some distance and perspective on things that she has not questioned before, and come to a different conclusion in regard to her own wishes for the future. Her use of phrases such as 'huge step', 'changed a lot' and 'as long as I can remember' show just how sizeable this change is. She links this to the experience of travel in allowing her to escape her usual 'bubble':

> *"Kind of like take you out of your bubble and also make me question sometimes like what I felt that I wanted to do or I wanted to be in the future, is that really what I want to do or is it just something that maybe like society or like following my friends' footsteps or anything else that just made me think that's something that I want but I really don't"* (ll. 400-405)

The idea of a bubble emphasises a closed off element to regular everyday life that had created a barrier to disentangling what she thinks she wanted from what she 'really' wanted. Through travel she was able to escape this bubble and engage with a new and different social environment, which led her to think about herself and her life in a new way.

This idea was echoed by James:

> *"it gives you … a sense of quiet and quiet not in terms of decibels, quiet insofar as you don't know anyone, you don't have any prior preconceptions and they have no preconceptions of you so you can, you can use that to test and learn as you go along, you know, see who you are really, like dig under the surface a bit. And so it gives you that sense of quiet for reflection, introspection"* (James, ll. 1076-1083)

The lack of other people's expectations is seen as freeing, allowing for an empty space that is experienced as positive as it allowed him to fill that space in a way that felt meaningful for him.

Charlotte also spoke about the benefit of getting away from people's expectations of her, which allowed her to find her "most comfortable self" (l. 296). She also linked this experience to connecting with a new natural environment:

> *"… when I was in like the mountains or snowboarding it's kind of like all of that dissipates and like, um, it's like a calmness and I guess reconnecting to myself and probably what's important to me. Like what I value or like what I enjoy, um, and I think even at that point I probably still didn't necessarily know what I wanted to do but I felt more connected to who Charlotte is or who I am"* (Charlotte, ll. 250-257)

Here Charlotte reflects on the impact of the mountains on her *"because the snow absorbs a lot of like the sound it's just so peaceful" (Charlotte, ll. 236-237)*. This provides her with a external and internal sense of quiet that allows her space to reflect and connect with herself.

However, it was not only lack of outside influence that were seen as helpful for connecting with one's authentic self. Throughout the interview, Maria named a number of different social encounters that introduced her to new ways of thinking about what is important in life and how to engage with living. These mainly revolved around cross-cultural examples, where people from different countries and backgrounds give her a new perspective on her own values and beliefs.

Georgina connected the process of self-discovery not only to identity, who she is, but also to finding her purpose and meaning in life:

> *"And I suppose the experience of travelling abroad and being somewhere new enabled me in some ways to connect more authentically with my own sense of self and that so-called identity in terms of what it meant to me or what it had meant to me and the meaning that I had ascribed to my life, my sense of purpose"* (Georgina, ll. 302-307)

This shows the fundamental importance of authentic self-connection, and how it can be seen as the start of finding and being able to work towards a life that feels truly internally meaningful. Lastly, Georgina highlighted the role of the self as an active agent who takes responsibility for this internal process, rather than as a passive person for whom simply being in a new physical environment is sufficient to connect with one's authentic self:

> *"You know, in a way that enabled me to see what led to some of the choices I had made and my own sense of responsibility for choosing how I want to move forward and live my life. Um, you know, and, and not falling into or, or sort of not falling, I think it can be very sort of, we can fall into these patterns quite easily of constructing our identity in ways that feel very familiar to us"* (Georgina, ll. 296-302)

Here, she highlights the importance of her own agency and therefore responsibility in making life decisions. She juxtapositions being an active responsible agent that makes active choices with being a more passive agent that "falls into" patterns of behaviour. This brings to the fore the role of seeking new and unfamiliar experiences, like those that shaped her travel experience, in making choices that feel self-determined, authentically connected to self and intrinsically meaningful.

3.4.2. Subtheme two: 'A different way of being'

Building on the last subtheme that focused on reflecting on self-identity and meaning, six participants also spoke about travel as giving them the space to respond to these newly discovered, more authentic selves. They spoke about it giving them the freedom to move in new ways that took account of their authentic needs in that moment. This was due to both a lack of other home influences that would have pushed them in a different direction, as well as an open space for exploration. Lastly, the experiential nature of travel allowed participants to not only experience external changes, but also internal shifts.

> *"I think everyone has loads of goals which are sort of have been imposed on them anyway so, or something that you just have to do because of a and b, um, so yeah it's,*

yeah it feels nice when it's something that comes as if from like inside you in a way" (Paulina, ll. 720-725)

For Paulina, travel allowed her to respond to intrinsic needs and desires she had, and focus on doing something for herself. She compared this to other goals in life, that were set by others and felt more extrinsic. These are things you 'must do' like: "you must go to school and get good grades, get a good job, get a pay rise, get a better job, get another pay rise…" (Paulina, ll. 212-215). These are things she described as being promoted by her family and wider society for someone of her social class, and largely due to their ability to lead to material/financial gain.

Nicola gave concrete examples of how travel and getting from these external pressures allowed her to live differently:

"It meant, it meant (pause), it definitely meant not getting on this treadmill, so you had to have a job, so you have to pay your mortgage, so you then you have to meet a man, you have to get married, I did want to get married so, but there must have been something that was stopping me" (Nicola, ll. 310-313)

The quote illustrates that for Nicola, travelling abroad was a way of getting away from a prescribed way of living that she did not feel like she wanted for herself. The use of the word "treadmill" indicates a life that is relentless, never ending, and keeps you on a particular path and is difficult to step off of. It gives the impression of being trapped, and not free to make other choices that are not 'the norm'. Her relationship to these life events is mixed, as choices like getting a job just to pay the mortgage did not appeal to her, even though some things like marriage is something that she might have wanted.

Georgina reflected on this topic more abstractly and linked travel to loosing old attachments, through which she was able to reflect on whether they were still serving her:

"…even loosening my attachment to, you know, those things that perhaps had given me a sense of meaning and purpose and the sort of security of staying with something that's quite stable and (pause), but actually there's, it's, it's, it's a bit, it's a bit stagnant, it's a bit stale, there's no movement and fluidity" (Georgina, ll. 353-359)

Here, Georgina elaborates on the trade-off between freedom and security, and travel's ability to provide the former at a cost of the latter. This freedom of movement is something that was

salient for Georgina, as she attributed her being able to overcome her "stuckness" (l. 567). This was due to the sheer amount of possibilities that she was presented with whilst travelling. For her, travel created a "natural organic" sense of movement, one that propelled her forward. She described this movement as fluid. She used the metaphor of a "wave" (Georgina, l. 365), and that instead of being afraid and grabbing a life raft, she trusted the wave and rode it so see where it would take her. Paulina also mentioned that the nature of her travel experience, where there was not as much of a set routine, also allowed to be *"more flexible in the moment, react to your needs in the moment, less pre planned" (*Paulina, ll. 525-526). This idea was echoed by Maria, who attributed travelling on her own to being able to do things that are "only for you. And that's really, that's really good, like it helps" (Maria, ll. 112-113), thereby highlighting just how conducive this was to her wellbeing.

Georgina further reflected how these external changes could lead to internal changes for her:

> *"It was almost as though that physical movement, the act of travelling in and of itself, sort of sparked a movement internally, within myself that created wider possibilities, an opening, a space to question, to, to reflect, to be differently"* (Georgina, ll. 276-282)

Georgina expressed that the physical movement she engaged with whilst travelling, such as exploring new places, hiking, swimming, as well as a shift in routine, also allowed for things to also move internally. It opened her mind up to a "different way of living, a different way of being" (Georgina, l. 230). It allowed her to be experientially made aware and reflect on other possibilities. This is because it allowed her to connect with things she hadn't previously connected with:

> *"…intellectually I could connect. I mean, you know, I can, I could connect, there were many possibilities, of course there's opportunities and, you know, but emotionally I felt trapped, I felt really trapped"* (Georgina, ll. 579-583)

This quote shows the difference between knowing something intellectually, being able to cognitively understand and envision something, and knowing something behaviourally, through experience. For Georgina, the latter was easier to connect with and allowed her to make the behavioural changes that led to emotional changes more readily.

3.4.3. Subtheme three: Feeling 'at home'

Three interviewees reported experiencing a sense of home and belonging whilst travelling. This was highly sought after as it was felt necessary to feel better and work through their existential crisis. Despite travel being in one way a leaving of home in the traditional geographical sense, the place to which they travelled felt more like a home that was warm, comfortable and containing. This was due to a number of different social factors, including individual people, community as well as the culture at large.

For example, Emilia's travel allowed her to access a sense of home she did not feel where she was previously living:

> *"Because when you kind of heal I guess you do need to, something needs to feel home even if you're not home, you know, like in the home, home. And you create kind of a home for you, so it's kind of interesting because it was like you need the change but also you need a kind of home, it's just, yeah, I don't know."* (Emilia, ll. 327-331)

Emilia distinguishes between a 'home' in the traditional sense of a physical house one lives or has lived in, and a place that 'feels like home'. She juxtapositions this with travel as seeking change, and that these can both be true as the change sought is a place that feels more like a home than where you currently live. Emilia returned to Greece, her country of origin, which may have added a sense of familiar comfort and homeliness. However, for her, feeling home meant surrounded by people who care for her, "having a cocoon rather than being in London … living with a stranger basically" (Emilia, ll. 326-327). She craved a "safe harbour" and "nest" where she felt less alone, more contained, and safe enough to cope and work through some of the difficult emotions she was experiencing after her existential crisis and left her feeling restored and able to better cope.

For Charlotte, the experience of travelling to Canada created a sense of belonging that was wider than close connections to individuals in a "home" or "nest". She was deeply impacted by the type of people she was around whilst she was there. She linked this to certain places attracting likeminded people. In her case, this meant people who embodied values and preferences that were aligned with her own, like enjoying the outdoors, an active lifestyle and who had a more openminded and laidback attitude to life. She described this as a "stripped back" way of living that was less materialistic than back home. There is a real sense in the data of not fitting with others at home, that the way people live life at home does not suit or appeal to her:

> *"…if I try and like picture it in my head, if for example where I live you like a bunch of people and they're all like different shades of like blue, like all different shades of blue and that, that's just how it is, it's kind of like I feel like I got plonked into the middle of it and I'm like green or something. Um, but I'm still like expected to be around all of these different shades of blue but I'm like, I'm green!"* (Charlotte, ll. 398-404)

This quote highlights not only the extent of which Charlotte feels different to everyone around her at home, but could also be interpreted as feeling misunderstood by others, not seen or accepted for her metaphorical 'colour'. Through travel, Charlotte is able to connect with other 'green' people, and she reported "I'd become connected to who I felt was like my true self" (Charlotte, ll. 387-388). Continuing the blue/green colour metaphor, she described that this sense of connection to her true self was difficult to maintain once she returned home:

> *"I think when I came back I was like a real like bright green, like sticking out like a sore thumb whereas I feel like I've, as you adjust to being in a place again or back home again I feel like it's toned down a bit more and maybe I'm more of a like a teal green/blue and being like back to what I was before"* (Charlotte, ll. 411-418)

Through the use of this metaphor, Charlotte describes slowly fading connection to her true self. Continuing her use of the terms that her 'true self' is green, it seems that becoming more blue is reconnecting more with a 'false self' which allows her to fit in better at home. This change could be caused by a number of factors, but is likely to be linked to changes that feel necessary to live back home for Charlotte. This could be changes that are needed to live economically, like engaging in work she does not feel as connected to, or to live psychologically, in order to maintain connections with the friends, family and community around her. There is a sense that this causes an internal conflict and discomfort for Charlotte.

This sense of unease at home is echoed throughout the interview. For example:

> *"I always thought I might feel like homesick, um, but that feeling kind of never came. And if anything, I felt, I felt more homesick for Canada when I came back than when I had gone away"* (Charlotte, ll. 94-97)

By reflecting on her sense of homesickness, Charlotte highlights the concept of 'home', and what it means for her. Similar to Emilia, it suggests that her traditional family home in the UK is not the one that she missed, perhaps due to a lack of feeling 'at home', and the internal comfort and emotional containment this brings. Instead, she reported that Canada will "always

feel like a home to me" (ll 701-702), as she feels comfortable there and sees it as a place where she fits in.

Unlike Charlotte and Emilia, Nicola never used the word home when speaking of her travels. Instead, she spoke about the sense of family and community she felt whilst in Kenya:

> *"Well I used to go to the orphanage Mass every Sunday so all the children would be there and all the community that I knew, the people that looked after the children, the managers I knew, Sister* [redacted]*, she was Irish I knew, they, they were like my family actually"* (Nicola, ll. 288-291)

Her use of the word family gives a similar impression to other participants use of home: an environment that felt warm, supportive and containing. She also reported: "I never felt lonely in Africa" (Nicola, ll. 294). This was linked to feeling of being both able to give and receive love from the people around her, like the children in the orphanage she volunteered at. She contrasted this with the love she felt with her biological family at home:

> *"I was raised in a society in a safe happy home, I had 3 brothers and sisters, but I think in some way I didn't feel a lot of love in the way I was living. You know, my parents loved me, my brothers and sister loved me but I didn't, I didn't feel love in a way that made me feel that I could thrive"* (Nicola, ll. 140-143)

There is reoccurring theme of confusion, as well as a sense of guilt, over what it was about her time in Africa that allowed her to access the love that she needed to thrive and feel well, which she did not feel at home. Having returned from being abroad for 20 years a few years ago, there is also a large sense of loss over the love, community and life she had built for herself in Africa. This is not just linked to changing geographical location, but also a change in time as a lot of the children she felt so close to had grown up and were in different life stages now. Furthermore, despite having made new friends and connections, there is a sense of not having been able to replace these very loving and nourishing relationships she had whilst abroad and struggling to connect with the people around her in the same way. This may point to a lack of containing social structures that suit her way of relating and giving and receiving love.

3.4.4. Subtheme four: Gaining 'spiritual nourishment'

Two participants spoke of travelling as giving them the opportunity to connect with their spiritual selves. For them, part of connecting with their authentic self was getting in touch with their spiritual side. Participants spoke about being able to make the space to focus on that spiritual part of themselves, away from other demands and distractions at home.

For Nicola, seeking "spiritual nourishment" was an important part of her travel experience and informed the kind of work and volunteering she did while she was abroad.

> *"I find that really hard in life, you know, there's that thing about making it economically but then also spiritually finding nourishment and satisfaction"* (Nicola, ll. 322-324)

Throughout her interview, she reflected on the tension illustrated in this quote, being torn between having her economic versus spiritual needs met, and what leading a "rich life" meant to her. This was particularly related to the jobs she wanted to do in life. Before travelling to Africa, she worked in journalism/media in London, a career that was encouraged by her mother and financially well rewarded, left her feeling not entirely satisfied, and she knew "in [her] heart" (ll. 32) that it was not the right place for her. There was a sense of uncertainty as to whether seeking something beyond the life that she had been modelled in London was the right thing to do:

> *"… maybe I'm just making out the world to be far too complicated, maybe I just should have got married and gone to Sainsbury's every day"* (Nicola, ll. 249-250)

This quote shows her continued ambivalence towards the decisions she has made in her life, and whether she feels she has gone down the right path. Her statement about overcomplicating things could be seen as a way of diminishing her longing for a different life outside of London, whereas her example of "going to Sainsbury's everyday", one of the more banal elements of everyday adult life, gives a glimpse into her fear of perhaps feeling bored and remaining unfulfilled in that life. This can be contrasted with elsewhere in the interview where she talks about the deep sense of connection to Kenya and the children she met whilst volunteering at the orphanage there:

> *"Kenya did save me, you know, it gave me, and then I feel like (pause), it gave me the spiritual nourishment that I was unable to find in London"* (Nicola, ll. 380-383)

For Georgina, the spiritual aspect of her travels took her "massively by surprise" (Georgina, l. 440). Before travelling, she had been more focused on what was going on for her personally and professionally, and had less mental space to focus on what was going on for her spiritually, and was not aware that she was spiritually disconnected from herself:

> *"I started meditating, um, which is not necessarily something that I would do very often in England, in London. Um, (pause) but I, how do I even put this into words… Um, (pause), and it felt almost to me as though there was a sort of, I mean this is going to sound very clichéd but almost like a spiritual awakening where I felt oh wow, ok, there is an element of my life that I have not been connecting with. And that is my, my own, um, sense of spirituality connecting with something bigger that is not me, that is not God, but it's something bigger. And connecting with that really felt so soothing."* (Georgina, ll. 390-409)

This idea of connecting with something bigger, a form of transcendence beyond the immediate physical and material world that she is embedded in, had a profoundly positive effect on Georgina. Despite finding it difficult to verbalise, she continued to express the physical sensations that she felt when feeling spiritually connected to the world around her:

> *"Yeah it is, it is kind of, um, (pause), it's like a different kind of presence…. it, it's like it felt in my body (pause), like a, a river flowing within me, you know. So there's the, there is the sort of fluidity of it and, and, and the inter-connectedness of it but of course a river flowing in you, it can also feel, feel quite, there's, there's anxiety, there is anxiety but there's movement in it and it's, it's dynamic and, and being with that in a very present way"* (Georgina, ll. 485-496)

This quote illustrates the intense sense of interconnectedness between herself and the external world, a sense of being part of a greater whole, and the inherent dynamism, of both positive and negative feelings, that this interconnectedness brings with it. It also touches on the role of nature in satisfying her spiritual "craving", which she mentions multiple times throughout the interview. She links this to the vastness of nature, such as the mountains or the ocean, and the feelings of awe it can evoke:

> *"… how massive it was for me at the time, um, the experience of it, connecting with something bigger, um, yeah, and, you know, it's almost like there's a sense of awe that I felt. Not all the time of course but there were, there were moments where I felt, I felt deeply connected to my own sense of pain and loss and suffering whilst at the same*

time deeply connected to a sense of awe, awe and aliveness and possibility and creativity within myself. So it was very emotional as well" (Georgina, ll. 423-430)

This quote shows the large impact of this spiritual connectedness, and the way it helped her connect to herself, and the myriad of emotions that she was experiencing at the time. The sense of awe points towards feeling a sense of the sublime, that opened her up to new ways of being and being able to move beyond the feelings of oppression that she felt at home. By *"connecting both inwards and outwards"* (Georgina, ll. 379), she describes a process that is simultaneously grounding and groundless, perhaps pointing towards the paradox of connecting with nature, something that feels like it opens you up to things much bigger than what you know, whilst simultaneously feeling very securely grounded in your momentary physical reality, both her own material body, as well as the material reality of the material world. It points towards a holistic type of connection, in many different, even opposing, directions.

3.5. Superordinate Theme III: Living in the present

The third subordinate theme looks at participants' experiences of living in the present whilst travelling. This theme was mentioned by six out of the seven participants and can be broken down into four subthemes. The first subtheme **'Enjoying the purity of the world'** shows the way in which travel allowed participants to live in the moment and hone in on enjoyment and other positive emotions that they may have not been as aware of before. The second subtheme **Living 'out of your comfort zone'** presents the way in which travel pushed participants outside of their comfort zones and made them face things in the moment they otherwise would have not had to, which resulted in overcoming fears, feelings of empowerment, self-belief and personal growth. The third subtheme **Socialising 'almost like when children interact with one another'** focuses on the small spontaneous positive experience of socialising with others whilst travelling, not in order to achieve any long-term gain, but in ways that made fleeting everyday moments more meaningful and enjoyable. Lastly, the fourth subtheme **Letting the 'future version of yourself deal with the chaos of next year'** outlines the way in which living in the moment can not only magnify positive feelings, but also lessen anxiety in significant and wellbeing-inducing ways.

3.5.1. Subtheme one: 'Enjoying the purity of the world'

Four participants mentioned their experience of being able to be more mindful of positive emotions whilst travelling. They reported a number of wellbeing inducing emotions, including joy, contentedness, relaxation and feelings of excitement. Accessing these positive feelings was linked to nature, being mindful of their occurrence in the body and actively choosing to focus on and enjoy those moments.

For Charlotte, life whilst travelling became more "free flowing" and laid back, in a way that allowed her to enjoy her time more. This way of living had a profound impact on her happiness:

> *"I just remember really checking in with myself on a regular basis, just being like how good is this or like this is I'm really happy or I'm really enjoying this and just sitting with that … there were obviously extra highs that would be like fun and exciting and then like the lows as well. But it just felt like a real baseline of just like aahh, this is, this is nice and I would like to feel like this a lot of the time"* (Charlotte, ll. 555-565)

Despite the inevitable ups and downs in life, travelling appeared to raise her baseline levels of happiness. Her use of 'aahh' also points to a feeling of relief, of letting go of pressure and feelings of calmness and relaxation that accompanied that. She later refers to this as an increase in feeling as "contentness *(sic)*" (Charlotte, l. 582), which seems deeper and longer lasting than a momentary increase in fun or excitement.

Wanting to enjoy the moment more was something Maria has wanted to do more before she went travelling. She thought that it would be difficult but once she started travelling, she 'didn't have to even think about it' (l. 202) and it came naturally. She said this ability to be mindful is 'part of what makes me feel good' (l. 316).

Maria, who described herself as a very organised and scheduled person before she went travelling, explained how travelling made her "flow the way I needed to" (l. 211) and react to her needs in the moment, rather than have her behaviour dictated by what she 'should' be doing. She was not interested in denying the fact that there is a future and that she sometimes needs to think about it, but she wanted to think about it 'not every day' (l. 176). This led to her experiencing less stress and more enjoyment. Enjoying the moment was inextricably linked to noticing and enjoying nature:

> *"So that's one of the things that probably like I learned the most while here because I just, those little things like watching the sunset, smelling the air, that smell of the beach and just feeling like the warm weather, those are things that I used to not, like not think about and not enjoy"* (Maria, ll. 146-150)

She described the sound of the waves as 'peaceful' (l. 288) and that the beach made her feel 'free and happy' (l. 129). She focused on a more somatic sense of enjoyment and felt less need to think. This is very different to the city environment that she found stressful, particularly when she was on her own, and would try and drown out by being on her phone and distracting herself in order to avoid feelings of anxiety and discomfort.

Charlotte also talked about the importance of nature, particularly the mountains, which she referred to as her "happy place":

> *"… one of the things I really liked was like really early in the morning or like into the evening where the sun would rise or set, it would shine on the mountain in a certain way so I'd always make a point of like stopping and like watching as it kind of lights up that side of it. So I feel like it almost stripped back a lot of things and I just enjoyed like the pure, the purity of like the world, if that makes sense."* (Charlotte, ll. 566-572)

Here she reflects on the purity of what she is enjoying, the simple and direct relationship between beauty in the external world and her internal feelings of enjoyment. She continues to reflect on the visceral nature of this enjoyment, how nature felt, looked and smelt. This points to the role of the body in acting as a vessel to access these feelings of wellbeing, and the connection between the outside world, the body and the mind.

For Emilia, travel was about self-care, and giving herself the time and space to prioritise her physical and mental wellbeing. She distinguishes seeking this type of self-care from seeking "leisure" or "holiday". This language denotes something more fundamental about what she is seeking, something that is necessary and needed, rather than a nice optional extra or want. Travel allowed her to not keep pushing through the emotional difficulties she was facing, but to engage in activities that were soothing and offered her some relief:

> *"Like getting the love you need, like the care, changing scenery, like being by the sea and be like, you know, life is good at the end even if things bad happen, like the sea, by the sea and the sun and my friend and even eating good food, you know, just, it's not like*

always the big things, sometimes it's just this like tiny things that make you happy and you realise that, you know, things are not too bad" (Emilia, ll. 635-641)

Again, this quote demonstrates the inextricable link between environment, physical and mental wellbeing for the participants. It shows the importance of visceral wellbeing, and how this is achieved through food, nature and weather. She continued to refer to this as "the whole environment and everything made me feel better. That was like reinforcing the positive feeling" (Emilia, ll. 626-628). She also refers to these things as "tiny things that make you feel happy", implying that they are small or even insignificant, despite their strong positive influence on her.

Lastly, James drew a different type of wellbeing-giving experience from travelling. For him, being in new and stimulating environments, like foreign cities that are "alien" to him, that expose him to new things and opportunities, heightened his senses, made him 'drunk on excitement' in a way that made him feel viscerally alive and positive.

3.5.2. Subtheme two: Living 'out of your comfort zone'

Four participants talked about the experience of travel pushing them outside of their comfort zone in a way that meant they had to react in the moment. This was different to how things were at home, where there was a comfortable fallback option that could be relied on if challenges wanted to be avoided. By being forced to confront challenges head on, participants reflected on being able to overcome them more effectively, leading to feelings of self-empowerment and personal growth.

Paulina talked about how travelling pushed her outside of her comfort zone, both mentally and physically. However, this push felt worthwhile and more enjoyable than it did at home. For example, she compared going to the gym with cycling through Jordan, and that cycling felt much easier to motivate herself to do as it facilitated new scenery and learning that she wanted and got her a step closer to a goal she had picked for herself. She also described that it was harder to not move forward and act whilst travelling. She spoke about feeling anxious or low at home sometimes, which would result in her default thinking *"oh I'm just going to sit here and not do like anything in a way"* (Paulina, ll. 138-139). Whilst travelling, her default was different and involved more forward motion, which made it easier to motivate herself to keep going even when things were difficult. She linked this to the time-limited nature of her

experience. This incentivised her to act in the moment, rather than put something off she wanted to do.

Charlotte picked up on a similar point, and talked about travel as forcing action because there was no default to fall back on. As everything was unknown and new, you had to build up a new way of engaging that was best suited to the new environment one was in:

> *"I think I feel with travelling, um, (pause), you, you kind of have to go out, like you can't just expect things to like fall in your lap so it's like if you want friends you have to go out and talk to people and make friends. Um, it's just I think I find it's a very different feeling, you have to put quite, you kind of get out of it what you put in"* (Charlotte, ll. ll.104-109)

Here, she reflects on the need to go out and meet new people whilst travelling, as retreating away from others would lead her to not have any positive relationships around her.

For James, these types of experiences left him feeling empowered and proving he was capable:

> *"it's a bit more about the travelling enables you to remind yourself of how capable you are and that if you can just get out of your own head it doesn't matter how stressful your environment is, you can just, you can just operate within sphere of influence and try and put it to bed. It's that self-mastery that travelling can, that can enable"* (James, ll. 634-639)

He referred to immediate challenges that come with being in an unfamiliar environment, such as fulfilling basic human needs such as getting food and clean water, that he did not have to worry about when he was back home in the UK. For him, it is this lack of safety net that increases his self-confidence, makes him feel empowered and learns more about what he is capable of. This picks up on the positive impact of being 'outside of your comfort zone' and that as well as accomplishment, it builds self-belief, self-reliance and self-efficacy. From this perspective, challenges are "just new problems to go and find solutions to but they're not things for you to worry about, they're just problems that need to be overcome" (James, ll. 914-919). Moreover, this was seen as rewarding because they are challenges that he has picked for himself, the stress and suffering felt purposeful, because they are on 'his terms' and therefore something he wants to learn to overcome.

For Maria, travel was also seen as a welcome opportunity to face her fears in order to grow and develop:

> *"… like I used to be really scared of insects… So that was one of the things that I was thinking when coming here …. like in the city I would usually like freak out and scream and I don't know, like I would go crazy. And like here I just needed to, (pause), to basically like overcome my fear a little bit at least…. it has made me grow …. And right now it's, yeah it's become like normal and that's a huge step for me because I've always been scared of like bugs, even when I was little."* (Maria, ll. 510-531)

Having overcome a fear she has had since childhood was an important experience for Maria. It appears that the nature of travel, and the change of environment that it involved, forced faster behaviour changes of lifelong habits as they created much more downside and disfunction that they would in her usual environment. Overcoming her fear allowed her to keep her 'door open and just look at the sun' (ll. 561-562), even with the possibility of a bug coming in. This idea of the open door can be seen as a metaphor for being open to new experiences in general, and the positive potential she felt that had for her. This change, and seeing herself as someone able to overcome fears and change, opened Maria up to new people and experiences:

> *"… if you go out it's the same like you're out of your comfort zone, you have to meet people maybe because you are by yourself and maybe you don't like the person that you're talking with right now but you have to adapt because that's what you have. I don't know, eventually maybe you'll find that you'll enjoy other type of personalities" (Maria, ll. 697-702)*

Being open allowed Maria to learn about other types of people and things she didn't know she liked. By embracing the unknown during her travels, and seeing difference as a potential positive, rather than as something to be controlled and avoided, it allowed Maria to have a richer, more multifaceted experience than she might have otherwise had.

3.5.3. Subtheme three: Socialising 'almost like when children interact with one another'

Three participants talked about the inherent joy of small spontaneous social interactions with others whilst travelling. These were fleeting moments with others that they really appreciated

and enjoyed. They compared this to their experience of these sorts of interactions back home, where they happened less frequently and were not as inherently enjoyable.

For James, travel acted as a catalyst for social interaction as being in new places and moving around in public spaces was an integral part of his experience. For him, this was one of the most rewarding parts of travel:

> *"Because it's almost like when children interact with one another, when you remove the complexities of language which do enable, like that does enable people making friends and all the rest of it, better communication, but sometimes it's just wonderful to go into a shop and have local people giggle at how silly your accent is and, and it's almost childlike, it's fun and it's, it's innocent and that's nice"* (James, ll. 688-695)

The comparison to children, giggling and being silly, brings to the fore the joy and fun that can come from being with others. The greater reliance on non-verbal communication, due to language barriers, highlights the more emotional side of communication. Elsewhere he describes the innocence and purity of this type of connection, and that it can feel more open and genuine where people are not "trying to put up a front" (ll. 720) or thinking transactionally.

For Maria, one of the things she enjoyed most about travelling was meeting new people. She described meeting new people as 'natural' (l. 249) whilst walking along the beach or cooking in her communal kitchen. The nature of not knowing anyone, sharing resources, being out in public spaces a lot and being in a generally open and convivial environment meant she met 'people everywhere' (ll. 269-270). Sometimes this would lead to closer connections, where details were exchanged, but something it would just be an enjoyable way to spend 10 minutes. Either way, the social interactions were seen as positive and wellbeing giving and integral to her experience of travel.

Lastly, for Paulina, travel had a profound impact on her level of socialising with new people. She described being an introvert and not striking up conversations with strangers and acquaintances back home. However, she noticed that whilst travelling she was much more open and had very positive interactions with new people she met, and that sharing the experience of travel with them made the experience more enjoyable than only being alone. She linked this to a number of different environment factors including different cultures and paces of life allowing more space for casual interactions with strangers, having an automatic conversation starter as you are sharing an interesting experience with other travellers and people being in transit and therefore more open to new social experiences. These factors

differ from her life back in London, where the culture and pace of the city does not allow for as much social interaction, small talk with people would be with people around work as the shared experience which she is less interested in, and people are already part of established more closed-off social (i.e. friends or family) groups. Beyond these external differences, Paulina also described an internal psychological shift:

> *"I think it might be like a weird psychological thing where like if I'm at home I just like I'm not going to approach people because it's embarrassing … versus when you're somewhere like completely new and you just feel like we have nothing, like you're not going to be there tomorrow so if people think you're weird like who cares. So maybe it's just actually sub-consciously that being like a little bit like braver and like bolder, approaching people … 'cos yeah just always feels a little bit easier, yeah, for some reason. You don't care as much like what people think about you"* (Paulina, ll. 503-515)

This quote illustrates a reduction in fear of other people's judgement for Paulina, a shift from feeling embarrassed to thinking 'who cares'. This sentiment was echoed by James, who described travel as a great way to overcome social anxiety. This reduction in fear came naturally and allowed her to talk to people more easily which she described as "quite like for your general mood" (Paulina, l. 354) and makes you happier. Being more open and having positive social interactions felt like an accomplishment for Paulina. These experiences can start a cycle of positive reinforcement and build social confidence and are associated with joy:

> *"…it doesn't necessarily have to be like big things or like huge conversations … sort of this like more spontaneous ... interactions that, yeah, just, yeah, just feel, to be honest I think they feel pretty good when you have them in, like even in your everyday life"* (Paulina, ll. 493-498)

Lastly, Paulina also talked about the positive experience of being helped by others. Whilst travelling, she talked about gaining a lot of support from people, such as providing her water, food and letting her pitch her tent in their yard. Receiving these types of informal support made her feel good and brought the kindness of people to the fore of her experience.

3.5.4. Subtheme four: Letting the 'future version of yourself deal with the chaos of next year'

Three participants described that living more in the moment not only increased their level of positive feeling, but also lessened the negative feeling of anxiety. They linked this experience to the impact of reducing one's horizon, focusing on one's current sphere of influence. This was in part made possible by being physically engaged in one's environment, which allowed less space for the mind to wander and create insurmountable levels of anxiety.

James described this phenomenon as follows:

> *"…reduce the horizon a little bit, just, just enjoy the challenges and the chaos of right now and let the future version of yourself deal with the chaos of next year and the rest of it"* (James, ll. 943-945)

By reducing his horizon, James felt it took the pressure off him and reduced his anxiety. It allowed him to react more to his current momentary needs, adjusting your behaviour to meet your current needs, with the knowledge that you may have to make a different decision in the future when your needs and priorities change. Nature played an important role in creating these situations:

> *"Much as going into nature can be, whereby, because you bring your horizon from such a long way away when you're ruminating about things that could happen from the safety of your living room when you're dealing with more immediate challenges, stresses, you are that much more aware, alive and suddenly, you know, you might not have as many thoughts but the ones that you have seem to have a lot more value"* (James, ll. 1151-1158)

By dealing with more immediate challenges, there seemed to be no space for rumination and anxiety in James's mind.

> *"I think your mind is highly resilient, highly versatile, and really capable of, of dealing with uncertainty and challenge and risk but it's just not equipped to sit in a room and worry, it's just not…"* (James, ll. 983-990)

This quote crystalises James thinking around the difference between immediately present risk and the stress it creates vs hypothetical or thought based risks that create worry and anxiety. The former is conceptualised as something positive to be overcome and can feel satisfying, whereas the latter is something that creates mental illbeing.

This sentiment was echoed by Maria who decided to change her relationship to thinking about the future whilst travelling. Maria was not interested in denying the fact that there is a future and that she sometimes needs to think about it, but she wanted to think about it "not every day" (l. 176) This strategy curbed her anxiety, which was based mainly around feeling the pressure to have to decide where she wanted to be in five and ten years time, both in terms of career and family.

For Paulina, the reduction in anxiety came from being very active "in really beautiful places" whilst travelling, most notably the cycling portion of her trip:

> *" there's also something about cycling in particular … because you're just, like it's all like physical like, yeah, first of all like all new experiences …. you're constantly like tired so you don't really have that much time to, um, really think about, think over, like over-think stuff …. which tends to generally help with, um, with like anxiety and things like that"* (Paulina, ll. 90-107)

For her, wellbeing has correlated with a lessening of anxiety that she linked to her mind being occupied through the physical demands of cycling, as well as always being in new and stimulating places. This is an example of the connection between body and mind, and the visceral experience of wellbeing that is facilitated by travel. The lessening of her anxiety was very evident for Paulina:

> *"I don't quite bite my nails but I do something similar … and when I like, not just that trip but I feel like whenever I go like even on shorter breaks … I tend to keep them like active and try to make them as adventurous as, as I can, I always notice that my nails look so much better afterwards. It's, it's, it is just, like I don't even have to try to think about it, I just stop like, yeah I guess I don't feel as anxious or even, like sometimes I don't even notice I get anxious, it's just like every day stress and everything that you just don't, um, feel as much"* (Paulina, ll. 161-172)

Here, Paulina describes a nervous habit that she struggles to stop doing at home. However, when she is travelling and being active she stops the behaviour without even trying. She

attributes this to a lack of anxiety, and although travel can bring negative emotions such as fear or stress, they are different to the types of anxieties and everyday stresses she feels at home. How she was feeling whilst travelling also impacted her use of anti-depressants which she stopped taking whilst travelling and that she described as “a very good thing” (Paulina, l. 189). Whilst travelling, there seems to have been a change in the underlying causes of her anxiety and low mood, which may have contributed to a lessening of symptoms such as nail biting and symptom management like anti-depressant medication.

3.6. Superordinate Theme IV: Impact of travel on existential crisis

Given that travel came off the back of experiencing existential crisis, an important part of the travel experience was experiencing positive change and movement away from their previous state of crisis. This theme was mentioned by all seven participants. The extent of change can be thought of as following along a continuum, with some participants experiencing more drastic long-term changes to the way in which they live their lives, and others more temporary changes in mood. This superordinate themes explores both ends of this continuum. The first subtheme **‘My own way to heal’** outlines the role of travel in processing emotions and healing. The second subtheme **‘I’ve had this great experience, so what does this mean now?’** explores the short-term benefits of travel and how feelings similar to those experienced during crisis can return after travel.

3.6.1. Subtheme one: ‘My own way to heal’

Four participants spoke about their experience of travel as a way of processing their emotions and healing from existential crisis. Furthermore, they described travel as a catalyst for change, as well as having the ability to transform their lives. Through the experience of travel, they reported being able to connect with new ways of living and make changes to their lives that they were able to continue implementing even when they returned from travel. Which type of experience the participants attributed most of these changes to, differed between individuals.

For example, Georgina reported travel having a significant positive impact on her life. For her, most of the change she experienced happened when she returned from travelling:

> *“I think actually returning, it was only then that I really started to recognise, fully recognise what that trip had offered me and to actually digest it and absorb it. And it*

> *was then that I then made the decision to quit my job, to, to, you know, move, move house. Um, and to, to change. I mean not, er, to change in the sense of make changes in my life that felt more meaningful for me, that are actually quite scary but … exciting. And as you said it was kind of that connecting not only with the intellectual side of it but actually emotionally feeling, feeling it emotionally, um, and holding both"* (Georgina, ll. 656-666)

This quote illustrates that even though a lot shifted whilst she was travelling, it was only upon her return that she was able to take in everything that had happened – both externally and internally. It was only upon return that she was able to translate the sense of new passion and purpose she found in South Africa to her life back in the UK. Earlier in the interview, we talked about the difference between intellectually knowing there are other ways of living, and emotionally and physically seeing those different possible choices and knowing it in an 'embodied' way.

By having had the experience of living differently, it seems that Georgina is able to access a different way of living and adapt them to her life in the UK more meaningful and satisfying. For her, this is also about taking responsibility for making these life choices, and being an active agent in the change process, a process that was facilitated through her experience of travel. Although there were of course limitations, as well as the acknowledgement that she may change her mind at a later date, this allowed her to make whole host of changes. These included a house move to be closer to nature and a change in career to allow herself to make more time for other things that are important to her. It allowed her to "maintain that sense of movement and fluidity on a more everyday kind of level …. And it just made me connect with what is very important and that it's actually the everydayness that you spend most of your life living" (Georgina, ll. 722-733). Making these changes allowed her to avoid feeling the sense of stuckness and oppression that motivated her to travel, and to move and embrace the freedoms that she had.

Moreover, change was possible for Georgina due "a sense of trust within myself to live differently" (Georgina, ll. 709-710) and to take a leap of faith. Travel allowed her to:

> *"make decisions that I knew were quite difficult but I knew that if I didn't make them there would be no change… it almost gave me the courage to take a leap of faith in responding differently to my current lived everyday life or existence in London. So in that sense it did feel transformational because I, I, it was almost a catalyst for me to be able to make some of those changes"* (Georgina, ll. 521-529)

Her use of words such as 'transformational' show just how large the impact of her travel experience was. The leap of faith she mentions in this quote mirrors the leap of faith she took when she decided to travel. Through the experience of travel, a reduced sense of fear may have impacted her ability to make bold and daring decisions. She described travel as a catalyst for change, a process that precipitates and accelerated change for her.

Maria described travel as "my own way to heal myself" (Maria, ll. 387-391). This was not something she intend to achieve by moving to the beach for a few months and took her somewhat by surprise. Speaking to how she felt after her breakup, the trigger for her existential crisis, Maria reported:

> *"… everyone tells you it's going to be fine but like I guess I, by being here like and being in peace with myself has made me realise that emotionally I'm going to be fine, like it has nothing to do with him. And it's just, I just think it's like the peace that I feel with myself"* (Maria, ll. 575-580)

This quote shows the emotional healing that Maria was able to achieve whilst travelling, and the sense of internal calm she experienced. For Maria, this positive change was linked to travelling by herself and getting out of her usual 'bubble', and by getting 'out of your comfort zone and learn things" (Maria, ll. 652-654). This experience allowed her both to learn about and connect more fully with her authentic self, enjoy the present as well as overcome some of her fears. Moreover, this shift changed her attitude to life more generally, from one that was more rigid and planned, to one that was more laid back and trusting in the process.

For Emilia, travel allowed her to take the time and space she needed to process her feelings about her break-up. It allowed her to "try to untangle all these different thoughts and all these different feelings and basically this one question, what does this mean for me and why does it hurt" (Emilia, ll. 467-474). She linked this to being in a warm and caring environment where she felt safe to begin the difficult process, as well as being in an environment that felt more laid back and that allowed her to slow down and have more space for her to focus on her own feelings and emotional needs. This allowed her to be in a better situation where she felt "stronger" (Emilia, l. 381) and able to face her life back home:

> *"And then, you know, when you come back and you're like ok I'm ready to restart and deal with life and stuff and, yes, it just felt that I was, I don't know, you know, these*

> *things take time. I don't think, you know, I sort everything in 5 days, it just, you do these initial baby steps that are so important to jump"* (Emilia, ll. 628-635)

Given the short duration of Emilia's trip, this quote demonstrates the role of travel as a catalyst for positive change. For Emilia, it was an important and drastic first 'jump' that allowed her to focus on herself and take care of her emotional needs in a way that did not seem accessible back in London. This is similar to Georgina's description of travel as a catalyst for positive change.

For Charlotte, the healing power of travel was also linked to the social environment she was surrounded by whilst travelling:

> *"I feel like there's a lot of healing that comes with those conversations with people that you would never, ever meet sort of on a bog standard like every day, because they're in a completely other part of the world"* (Charlotte, ll. 318-322)

For Charlotte, this healing was associated with conversations with people she would not have met in her everyday life back home. This access to other people's way of making sense of the world provided Charlotte the opportunity for "real healing … mixed with like development and awareness of self" (Charlotte, ll. 763-764). She described the healing experience as 'being able to reconnect to myself" (Charlotte, ll. 326-327), which was very 'grounding' (Charlotte, l. 324). The use of the word grounding highlights the sense of calm that came from feeling congruent. This self-development and self-awareness came from connecting with parts of her that felt authentically her, though they were linked to other people bringing it out in her. This was in part due to travelling on her own, and to explore the way she would go about things. She contrasted this to her life with her ex, where his way of doing things could take precedent. This also built her sense of confidence.

3.6.2. Subtheme two: 'I've had this great experience, so what does this mean now?'

Unlike the sentiments expressed in the last theme, four participants also expressed continued feelings of anxiety and crisis despite the experience of travel. In particular, their return from travel sparked a lot of fear that the positive changes they had experienced during travel would not last and they would return to feeling how they did before travelling.

For example, James expressed that travel was a positive experience that allowed him to step back and reflect on himself and what he wanted to gain from his life. He talked about feeling free and empowered whilst travelling, and learning a lot about himself. However, as James approached the end of his travelling experience, and noticed he would need to start earning money again soon, anxiety, similar to the one he experienced before travelling, began to creep back in. However, this time he described being more introspective about the anxiety:

> *"I found myself going, falling into that trap of ok well now I've come to the end of …. I need to find work so therefore, well the natural starting point is well do what you're most qualified to do. And then you're looking at the same industry and similar companies and you're thinking well hang on a minute, did I just leave and cut my career in half to go and do exactly the same thing, what am I doing. But it feels quite, it feels like a cage because you go I don't know what else I can do"* (James, ll. 896-905)

His use of the words trapped and cage are evocative of feeling not free, feeling anxious and restless, and very different to how he felt whilst travelling. He speaks of the natural path dependency, and the ease of falling back into what is known and what he knows he is able to do. At this point, James is trying to understand where he goes to from here, whether he returns to his old life from which travelling would have been a temporary break, or whether he is able to make use of his experiences and learning from his trips in order to apply them to making more sustainably wellbeing driven decisions.

Paulina, who had already returned from travelling, had a similar experience in regard to the long-term impact of travelling on her wellbeing. Like James, she experienced a significant reduction in anxiety whilst travelling. However, when asked about whether any of these effects translated to her life back home she reported:

> *"I think that, you know, quitting the job and then still going, you know, doing the travelling … like definitely felt I suppose like happier and, um, more like confident in a way, um, afterwards, I would say. Yeah. I don't think, um, I can't say that it had necessarily … had some like super long-lasting implications or anything like that… I still on occasion get anxious and if something bad happens I could probably get anxious again"* (Paulina, ll. 538-546)

Paulina expresses some hesitation in this extract, pointing to perhaps feeling unsure in what she is expressing, or unsure whether she was giving me the 'right' or hoped for answer. Despite feeling more confident and happier whilst travelling and when she first got back, she

expressed that travel had not cured her anxiety. For her, travel acted more as a coping mechanism rather than a way of overcoming the anxiety she experienced. For her, travel was a place to get away from stresses, such as those linked to work and career. Speaking about whether she spent time thinking about work she responded:

> *"I try not to think about it too much, to be honest, just because actually when I started to think about it that was the only thing that was making me slightly anxious because it was a little bit of like unknown … I was always going to be able to find a new job but eventually, but I wasn't sure how easy it would be so I sort of like decided that I wasn't going to worry about it. And, and once I'm done with like all my trips that I had planned then only after that I'm going to like start thinking about it because otherwise it will sort of, it would like, yeah it felt it would sort of spoil it if I was constantly worried … what's going to happen afterwards, er, then yeah I don't think I would have gotten that like benefit of it, um, you know, being, yeah, where the purpose was sort of not to worry about the real life for a bit I suppose"* (Paulina, ll. 568-582)

This quote demonstrates the function of travel as getting away and avoiding thinking about work-related anxiety. Paulina did not want to 'spoil' her experience, have it contaminated by negative emotions like anxiety and worry. She refers to not travelling as 'real life', implying that travel is not real life and perhaps pointing towards living in a 'fantasy' world that she will have to eventually leave. However, having had the positive experience of quitting her job, travelling, and then coming back and being able to find another job, made her think this is something she can do again, as well as incorporate travel in smaller ways such as by planning active and adventurous long-weekends away. For her, this adds excitement to an otherwise more 'boring' life. These statements point towards to her conceptualisation of travel as something that can be done on and off continuously, to keep giving herself that break she needs to cope with real life. It conceptualises travel as a tool they can draw on time and time again when necessary. As such, it does not follow the linear process of crisis, travel, end of crisis, but a much more iterative process.

Similar to Paulina, Charlotte described travel as healing from crisis but also questioned the longevity of that effect when the travel ended. Having had to unexpectantly return home from Canada due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Charlotte described returning to a feeling of crisis and spending her time thinking about where she could go to next, in order to have that positive feeling that travel provided her continue. Given the unplanned nature of return, there is also a sense of unfinished business and loss.

For Charlotte, connecting with her authentic self was an important part of travel and there is a sense that this connection is difficult to maintain whilst back home. In this sense, travel was also more of a way of managing rather than resolving her sense of existential crisis, making it a less long-term solution. She describes returning from travel as a 'come down', similar to the 'holiday blues… on a much grander scale" (Charlotte, ll. 381-383). This points towards a conceptualisation of travel as not real life, as an artificial, an unsustainable feeling similar to that of a drug.

> *"so I think because I'd fallen into that of what am I doing now, like I don't really know where I'm going or what I want to do, that same for me feeling of like existential, again of like what am I doing with life or what, I've had this great experience so what does this mean now"* (Charlotte, ll. 660-664)

This points towards the continuation of feelings of existential crisis. She speaks of crisis, then travel, then crisis, then travel as a repetitive or even endless cycle that might "just forever continue" (Charlotte, l. 769). Her desire to travel to somewhere new, similar to Canada but not the same, such as New Zealand, points to a desire for a similar lifestyle, but also for novelty and wanting to immerse oneself in an unfamiliar world and reap the benefits of that experience.

Lastly, for Nicola, travel provided her with many experiences and fulfilled many of her needs that her hometown of London could not. It provided her with a sense of fulfilment, adventure, love and connection that were lacking beforehand. Upon returning after 18 years abroad, there is a large sense of loss and confusion of how to move forward and to find that same level of connection, love and fulfilment back in her hometown.

Chapter 4 Discussion

4.1. Chapter overview

Having presented the interpretative accounts of the research findings in the previous chapter, this chapter will place these findings into their broader context. To do this, the findings will be presented in accordance with the four superordinate themes outlined in the previous chapter (Chapter 3). These are: 'Seeking external and internal change', 'Connecting with one's authentic self', 'Living in the present' and 'Impact of travel on existential crisis'. Here I will provide a brief overview of the findings but also contextualise the findings within the existing academic literature. I draw on the work of others presented in the Literature review (Chapter 1), as well as introduce new literature when necessary. This is standard practice within IPA (Smith et al., 2009) as it is common for the findings to include themes that were not anticipated. By doing this, one will be able to access how the findings from this thesis support or differ from the existing literature, and how they are able to make a unique contribution to the field of existential crisis and travel research. The chapter will then proceed to discuss the clinical implications of this work. The penultimate section will critically engage with the benefits and limitations of the study as well as offer some suggestions for how future research could build on this work. Lastly, the chapter will end with some concluding remarks, summarising and reflecting on the research findings and process.

4.2. Seeking external and internal change

The first superordinate theme refers to participants' desire for change that preceded their experience of travel. Having experienced existential crisis, and the significant amount of internal and external disruption and change that this brought with it, participants described a desire to leave their current environment that had left them feeling trapped and disconnected. Participants described their pre-travel lives at home as mundane and repetitive, which led to feeling bored, stuck, oppressed, unfulfilled, as well as unhappy and anxious. Moreover, they described feeling disconnected from people and routines, some even describing life as a façade. Furthermore, the majority of participants began their travel experience with a degree of trepidation, unsure what it would be like and worried about the unknown and any potential

risks. Nevertheless, there is a sense in the data that the decision to travel felt intuitively right, which allowed them to overcome their fears and take a leap of faith to venture out.

As outlined in Chapter 2 (Methodology), all participants experienced a limit situation that acted, at least partially, as a trigger for their existential crisis. The majority reported going through romantic relationship breakups, and a few reported career dissatisfaction. This is in line with the idea of limit situations (Jaspers, 1951), which bring issues linked to existential crisis to the fore. Crucially, participants reported struggling with issues related to lack of meaning, as they were no longer able to connect with life in the same ways as before the shifts in relationships and work. However, these experiences were not always sudden changes, but could also develop gradually. For example, issues around career echoed experiences of burnout, that became more existentially painful over time. For those dealing with relationship break-ups, the loss of partner also meant a loss of how they imagined their life to look like in the future, feelings of uncertainty around what they wanted in life, as well as who they were without their ex-partner. The findings add to existentialist ideas about ontological uncertainty leading to anxiety (Spinelli, 2005), by showing that this ontological uncertainty is also linked to feelings of deep unhappiness, boredom and hopelessness. These experiences echo symptoms of depression and burnout, which provides further evidence for the conceptual usefulness of the term existential crisis when thinking about and treating these difficulties.

Participants' experiences of existential crisis pre-travel echo the idea of living in *Alltäglichkeit* (Heidegger, 1927a), an everydayness that is determined by the 'herd', or social convention, such as social norms and expectations around work, relationships and lifestyle, which participants did not feel connected to. Participants described this everydayness very concretely, examples such as living in a semi-detached house or going to the supermarket or gym, and how this left them feeling empty and not in the right place. The findings also corroborate Heidegger's idea of *Umheimlichkeit* (Heidegger, 1927a), the notion of not feeling at ease or at home in the world one is living in. The language used by participants also point to the relevance of the feelings of inauthenticity that they experienced at home, corroborating the idea of living in 'bad faith' (Sartre, 1943), that left them feeling like life the way they were living it lacked meaning. These feelings are aligned with the definition of existential crisis outlined in Chapter 1 (Literature review), where feelings of anxiety, unease and meaningless are at the fore and are experienced as overwhelming.

It is these feelings that animated participants to try and find other places that, even if only temporarily, felt less alienating, inauthentic, meaningless and anxiety provoking. This could be interpreted as a way of escaping one's *Geworfenheit*, or thrownness (Heidegger, 1927a),

which are the external circumstances one is born into. Of course, no one can never fully escape their thrownness. For example, one cannot live in a different time or deny the relationships one was born into, yet travel could be interpreted as a way of making use of the space within these confines to move around and embrace the limited freedom that one does have. It shows that feelings of unease and inauthenticity are experienced on a spectrum, and one has at least some ability to impact how much these are experienced. This aligns with the ideas of existential psychotherapy, where through detailed description, reflection, and taking responsibility, one can feel more and less at ease within different dimensions of living (van Deurzen, 2009).

The findings also corroborate Wang's (1999) idea of travel being a strategy to escape existential inauthenticity. It shows that travel is seen as a way of escaping the façade and lack of meaning that is at the fore of everyday life during existential crisis. The findings add empirical evidence to the field of tourism studies, which focuses mostly on the experience of travel, without empirically capturing the experiences that led to people's decision to travel. This is also true for the limited number of psychological studies on the impacts of travel (Hirschorn & Hefferon. 2013), as they focus on the experience of travel and it's potential for positive psychological impacts, without gaining a more detailed understanding of the psychological issues that led them to their decision to go travel. This shows the benefit of applying a Counselling Psychology lens, as it does not simply focus on the social factors or positive psychological implications of an experience, but also captures the personal difficulties that are connected to the experience of travel.

Furthermore, it provides empirical evidence for the notion that people who have experienced existential crisis, arguably the most intense and difficult version of feelings of existential inauthenticity, still use travel as a strategy to try and work through this crisis and improve their wellbeing. This is an important finding as it is not self-evident that someone who has been through the level of upheaval and change that accompany an existential crisis would be seeking more change through travel. The findings show that this may be a useful strategy because it is a way for participants to connect or take control of the change that has been thrust upon them by the crisis, as well as perhaps to embrace and utilise the newfound freedom that appears when previously existing meaning from one area of life, like a job or a relationship, no longer holds firm.

Another aspect of this theme was a sense of intuitive knowing that participants reported in regards to travel. Despite all the changes and uncertainty they were experiencing, they felt

that travelling was the right step forward. This is aligned with the definition of crisis as it refers to times of difficulty and upheaval where action must be taken in order to overcome it (Oxford Learners Dictionary, 2023). Participants described taking a leap of faith, in the face of existential anxiety and lack of meaning. This can be thought of as an act of 'existential courage' (van Deurzen, 2020), the courage needed to rebuild meaning and connection in life after times of crisis.

In terms of existential psychotherapy's notion of the different dimensions of living (Arnold-Baker & Van Deurzen, 2008), participants reported difficulties across all four dimensions– physical, social, personal and spiritual. Given the intensity and level of difficulty that is part of experiencing existential crisis, this is unsurprising. However, by travelling, they are first and foremost changing their physical dimension of living, and thereby their social dimension as well. These two dimensions of living are the most externally located, whereas the personal and spiritual dimension are more internal. They are of course thought of as part of a holistic human experience, all intrinsically linked such that changes in one dimension impact the other dimensions. However, it seems that for participants it is making the external changes first that lead to greater internal changes, not vice versa. This is a different level of intervention than used in talking therapies such as traditional existential psychotherapy. The importance of this distinction will be further explored in Section 4.6. on clinical implications.

4.3. Connecting with one's authentic self

Within this superordinate theme, participants reported connecting with their own true and authentic selves through travel. This was a multifaceted process. It involved a cognitive and emotional exercise of reflecting on who one was, and who one wanted to be. It also included being able to respond to those newfound facets of one's authentic self and what one finds meaningful by having the space and freedom to explore different ways of being. The ability to have this experience was linked to several changes, including moving away from one's usual physical and social environment that felt constricting, embracing the void and freedom this allowed them to experience, as well as learning from new social and physical environments that inspired them to think, feel and act differently. These differences in the social environment led to some participants reporting feeling more comfortable and 'at home' whilst travelling. Lastly, for some, these changes also affected them spiritually.

The findings corroborate the tourism literature on existential authenticity in several ways. For example, participants' experiences of self-reflection and discovery align with Wang's intrapersonal mechanism of self-making, which is purported as one of the ways in which individuals achieve existential authenticity (Wang, 1999). However, the findings presented in this thesis provide a more detailed description of how this can be achieved. For example, it shows the role of active and deliberate self-reflection that brings people closer to feeling like their authentic selves, which is not something detailed by Wang (1999). The findings also highlight the importance of escaping one's known physical and social environment, particularly getting away from close others like family members and their expectations and assumptions. This allows participants to access a quiet place of reflection to explore internal possibilities that may lead to connecting with new authentic facets of their identity. Furthermore, they show that this does not just lead to self-making, but also opens up new avenues for meaning and purpose in life. The findings are aligned with findings on backpacking (Collins-Kreiner et al., 2018), student exchange programmes (Brown, 2009) and volunteering (Alexander, 2012), which provide empirical evidence for this kind of travel in providing a new perspective on living that can impact sense of meaning and purpose in life.

The idea of having an open space to explore self, echoes the psychotherapy literature, where the significance of the therapeutic space, rather than simply the therapist, is a key part of the therapeutic process (Bronstein & Flanders, 1998). Whilst travelling, there is no person, such as a therapist, to guide one through the process of self-discovery, yet there is a similar empty space. This allows for meaningful confrontation with self that can lead to feeling more authentically connected to self. This is not just the case for existential psychotherapy, but one of the features shared by the vast majority of talking therapies.

Beyond becoming aware of these new facets of their authentic selves, travel also gave participants the space to respond to these new facets, to nourish them and allow those parts of them to be responded to. This is different from the space offered in traditional talking therapy, as one is able to get the space to reflect, but still returns to one's usual environment which might provide more resistance and make change harder to achieve. This is because one is not in a more open space where one can play around with and test different ways of being in the same way as when one is in a new environment where one's role and responsibilities are not as established and entrenched. This allows new ways of being, thinking, feeling and behaving, to be explored that could make change feel more easily accessible and new habits easier to establish. This way of working could be a useful addition for clients looking to overcome existential crisis, as it shows the benefits of a more practical and embodied approach to creating change to address existential issues. Here, existential

therapy could also draw from other modalities that give more weight to behavioural interventions, or the impact of social environment on feelings of ill-being (Kilgarriff-Foster & O'Cathain, 2015; Sipe & Eisendrath, 2012). The clinical implications of this will be discussed further in Section 4.6.

A third area of connecting with one's authentic self that emerged from the data was finding a notion of 'home'. Here, perhaps counterintuitively at first glance, participants expressed that travel was important in allowing them to feel more at home than the home they left behind. This was connected to a sense of belonging, being surrounded by people they felt able to be their authentic self around, as well as being able to structure their everyday life in a way that aligned with their own needs. Here, participants were able to access care, love and acceptance from others in a way that they did not feel back home, and do so without compromising feeling authentically themselves. There is a sense that the social environment around them, both on an individual and social structural level, suits them better and allows them to move more organically, and feel thereby more connected to their authentic sense of self. This echoes Wang's (1999) idea of *communitas*, one of the interpersonal mechanisms he outlines in order to attain existential authenticity. It also corroborates findings from empirical studies across the tourism literature that connection with new people is an important aspect of achieving wellbeing through travel (Voigt et al., 2011). However, the findings presented here go deeper to show what a psychological impact this feeling of belonging and being at home can have on a person dealing with existential crisis. It also directly speaks to Heidegger's idea of *Unheimlichkeit*, again pointing to the notion that certain environments can lead to greater and lesser feelings of not feeling at home or at ease with one's position in the world (Heidegger, 1927a).

The last part of connecting with one's authentic self in the interview data was connecting and being able to attend to one's spiritual needs. Here, both religious and non-religious avenues to connecting with one's spiritual self were described. These were juxtaposed with one's economic needs, which for some, where more to the fore during life at home. This was due to familial and societal structures that placed more emphasis on the importance of economic needs being met, rather than one's spiritual needs and feelings of authenticity. This trade-off between economic and spiritual needs could also be seen as manifest in a trade-off between living in an urban environment, created to most effectively meet economic needs, and living in an environment closer to nature, where participants described feeling more spiritually fulfilled. These findings corroborate the literature on pilgrimage and wellbeing tourism, both of which include a significant physical and bodily dimension, where participants were found to experience transcendence of the material world in a way that led to greater physical and

emotional wellbeing (Laing & Frost, 2017; Voigt et al., 2011). However, it adds to the literature by showing that this spiritual element can also be an unanticipated by-product of other forms of travel, and speaks to a general sense of connection with one's spiritual self where one feels simultaneously very connected to the external world as well as one's internal world. It also shows the benefits of travel in addressing issues within the spiritual dimension of living (van Deurzen, 2009), and provides further empirical evidence for the interconnectedness for the different dimensions of living, where changes in one's physical and social dimension have a knock-on effect on one's spiritual dimension.

4.4. Living in the present

The third superordinate theme focuses on the way in which travelling fostered living in the moment for the majority of participants. Here, travel allowed individuals to take more notice of the small positive moments that happened aournd them on a daily basis. Part of this enjoyment was enjoying fleeting social interactions with others. Furthermore, living in the moment meant acting in the moment as well, which was felt to be particularly positive especially in relation to overcoming challenges and dealing with stress. Lastly, being more actively engaged with their physical and social surrounding allowed them to escape anxious worrying about hypothetical future scenarios, as their minds were more focused on the present.

More than half of participants spoke about the ability to connect with nature whilst travelling, and the impact this had on their sense of visceral wellbeing. This was described as different to how they engaged with the environment at home and therefore had a large positive impact on how they felt. They spoke about the feelings of joy this brought them, but also contentedness and relaxation. They embraced this change and took time out of their day, by slowing down, or being in nature, to fully enjoy and appreciate these moments. This change was described as something that happened organically, rather than something they had to actively work on. The finding is in line with a vast psychological literature on the benefits of greenspaces for wellbeing (Reyes-Riveros et al., 2021). However, it adds to the literature by drawing out the existential facets that are a part of this sense of wellbeing. In particular, participants spoke about the sense of awe they experienced when connecting with nature whilst travelling, and how this provided them with a powerful sense of amazement and connection with the world around them. This finding echoes work by Schneider (2011) who argues for the psychological importance of feelings of awe, an existentially and spiritually informed concept that he defines as the feelings of humility and wonder towards existence,

and the notion of being part of something so large and incomprehensible that it cannot even be captured by language.

Living in the present not only increased positive emotions for participants, it also reduced negative ones, most notably anxiety. This was linked to focusing on the here and now, and the impact one could have on the world in each moment. It can be seen as an antidote to the conceptualisation of anxiety as being the result of mentally time travelling to the future and thinking about hypothetical scenarios, which is a prevalent cognitive framework used to understand the experience (Eysenck, 2013). Travel fostered this way of being by being in a stimulating environment, that required one's attention in the here and now, thereby reducing one's mental horizon. This was the case in different ways for different individuals. For some, this was because travel involved physical activities that gave the mind less energy and time to think about other things. For others, it was because they needed to get their head around new challenges and ways of ensuring they were able to meet their basic needs, which left less time for anxious thoughts about the future.

The idea of living in the moment as a way of overcoming existential crisis is not overtly present in the existentialist philosophical or therapeutic literature. However, as existentialist crisis is intrinsically linked to the experience of anxiety, this may be an important tool to consider. Here, one can draw on other psychotherapeutic modalities, much as Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT), where it has been shown that being more present and focusing on emotions in the here and now can be an effective way of managing anxiety (Sipe & Eisendrath, 2012). Furthermore, thinking about the impact of connecting with nature as part of this process, also appears to be a helpful mechanism to overcoming existential crisis and is something that other forms of therapeutic intervention have drawn on. These clinical implications will be further elaborated on in Section 4.6.

Looking to the travel literature, the findings are aligned with previous work that conceptualises travel as a way of temporarily escaping the demands of a time-pressured and productivity-based society (Giddens, 1990). During travel, the body becomes an object in its own right with its own needs, rather than something upon which self-control or restraint is practised in the order to achieve the needs of roles linked to work or division of labour (Foucault, 1997). By stepping away from this, participants are able to connect more with their bodily selves, tune into their current feelings, and feel more authentically themselves. This corroborates Wang's (1999) intra-personal mechanism of bodily feeling in attaining existential authenticity. However, it is worth mentioning that not all participants who travelled took a break from work as some continued to work remotely. Therefore, there may be other mechanisms at play here

too. One factor might be the change in the physical environment, away from the urban environments that all participants lived in, and towards a more rural environment. Here, more opportunities to connect with nature and a slower pace of life may have had a similar impact on the body, and thereby on people's feelings of existential authenticity.

Living in the present was also linked to travel pushing participants to live outside of their comfort zone. This is because the new environments contained a lot of unknowns and were different to what they were used to, which forced them to adapt. For some, this even pushed them to confront some of their long-standing fears. This was because the parameters of the situation were different and their usual coping mechanisms were not available, such as retreating or avoiding the problem. However, this was seen as an overwhelmingly positive experience as it meant they were forced to act, leaving them feeling empowered and experiencing personal growth. Being in a new environment meant they had to build a new way of being to meet their physical, social and emotional needs. For example, how they were going to take care of themselves, make friends and move around. This immersion in a new space left less time to ruminate or overthink, as they were crucial and needed dealing with in the present. The focus on having to act more immediately may also be an effective way of combatting the anxiety that accompanies existential crisis, as well as build participants' confidence and sense of self-efficacy.

Thinking about this in relation to having previously experienced existential crisis, it suggests that travel allows participants to fill the void that the loss and crisis had left behind, with new intentional and functional ways of being that suited their needs in the moment. It points to the other side of the crisis coin, which has been said to be opportunity (van Deurzen, 2020). Furthermore, being away from their usual social and physical environment, they are able to shape this opportunity to fulfil their own current needs, which they link to wellbeing. Of course, there are always constraints, however, it feels like travel brought with it different constraints to the one's at home, which allowed people to test new ways of being in the hope of finding more fulfilling ways of being in their situation. It echoes the idea of existential courage (van Deurzen, 2020), the courage needed to step out and build new meaning, as well as the importance bestowed on novelty in attaining existential authenticity (Voigt et al., 2011). However, the data presented here gives more of an insight into how this might be the case. By travelling, participants are faced with new stimuli, and new connections were able to be made and therefore new ways of meaning could be built. Experiencing this, and being able to explore these opportunities, it likely to make it easier to let go of previously held attachments to old internal and external structures that used to provide them with meaning. This may make the process of letting go feel easier and more accessible as one is not left with as much of a void.

Another facet of living in the present was the impact it had on participants' social interactions with others. Here, they described positive fleeting social interactions. These were seen as interactions that were ends in themselves, as opposed to means to another end. Being in a new environment made participants more open to meeting new people, an attitude they felt they shared with those around them. There appeared to be less pressure on these interactions, which allowed participants to focus more on the immediate joy that these brought them, rather than anything else. Within the existentialist literature, small fleeting positive interactions with others is seen as a part of the social dimension of living (Arnold-Baker & Van Deurzen, 2008). However, here, more attention is paid to deeper long-term relationships with family, friends and partner. The data here points to the importance of smaller interactions, as a way of being in the world, and engaging in the world and that these too can have an impact on one's experience of being in the world, given the inherently relational nature of being. This is not surprising as one's sense of self – which is impacted and rattled during existential crisis – is inherently linked to one's relationship with any 'other'. This finding is in line with a more recent shift in the psychological literature, that points to the importance of connections with weak ties – relationships with community, strangers and acquaintances – on wellbeing (Huxhold et al., 2020; Sandstrom & Dunn, 2014).

In relation to the travel literature, relationships with others have always been presented as key to achieving existential authenticity. In particular, connecting with a community of like-minded individuals is presented as the most important type of sociability responsible for this impact (Wang, 1999). However, this is different to the types of social interactions presented within this superordinate theme. Therefore, the data presented here adds another facet to one's understanding of how social relationships whilst travelling can positively impact people and aid their connection with their existentially authentic selves.

4.5. Impact of travel on existential crisis

The final superordinate theme collated and analysed participants' experience of the impact of travel on their existential crisis. Some attributed a great sense of healing and long-term change due to their travel experience, whereas others reported the return of feelings of existential anxiety and crisis after travel.

For those who felt the experience to be healing and to have long-term impact, this was largely due to feeling positively different whilst travelling, and a sense that they were able to carry this positive feeling back with them once the travel experience had ended. The use of the word healing points towards the potential therapeutic benefits of travel. One shared healing experience was the sense of calm and peace that participants felt they had gained whilst travelling. Some associated this to being able to reconnect with themselves, pointing towards an experience of existential authenticity (Wang, 1999) and congruence (Rogers, 1995). For some, this connection with self allowed them to focus on the emotional aftermath of their crisis, away from their usual day-to-day distractions, in a way that allowed them to process the change and strengthen them emotionally. Others attributed this sense of calm to having had a positive experience after existential crisis, which had allowed them to believe that things will be fine again after crisis. They contrasted this form of knowing from experience, which they described as a deeper more emotionally impacting sense of knowing, with the idea of knowing something intellectually. These experiences also gave them a sense of confidence and self-efficacy because it showed them they were able to impact the situation and be involved in creating this sense of peace and calm, without the help of others, like ex-partners. This way of creating change is different to traditional talking therapy, where oftentimes a change in thinking precedes a change in behaviour. This will be picked up on further in Section 4.6. on clinical implications.

Moreover, some described travel as a catalyst, a first step or jump towards creating these changes. This conceptualises travel as only the first step that ignites further change later down the line. Here, travel allowed participants to experience different ways of being that made it easier to implement larger changes back home, such as changes to how they live and work. This way of thinking about travel is in line with Brown (2013), who argued that travel not only allows people to connect with a sense of existential authenticity whilst travelling, but that this experience can create connections and new meanings that can persist beyond the time of travel. However, only a few have examined this empirically (Kirillova et al., 2016). The findings here add another layer of empirical evidence to this assertion.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, an equal number of participants expressed their fears that the existential crisis would continue after travel. They feared the end of travelling, as it would end the respite from existential crisis and a continuation of the discontent they had experienced back home. This was particularly the case for participants whose existential crises were sparked by work and career. For them, the end of travel meant having to find a job again, and although they would be seeking a new job, they feared the job and the routine of their lives would leave them feeling similarly to how they felt before. There seemed to be a

lack of hope that they could find a job that they would experience as meaningful and fulfilling. This was in part because of a form of path dependency, the fact that because of their past experiences, these were the types of jobs they are most suitable for and that it would be hard not to fall back into them. This knowledge was also present during their time travelling, where thinking about job and what was next was kept at bay so as to not impact their travel experience negatively. This points to travel as a way of avoiding the trigger of the existential crisis, rather than a way of confronting or working through it. It points to the function of travel being more of a temporary distraction, rather than a way of processing existential crisis.

However, it is important to point out that participants' experiences did not fall into either distinct category, as even participants who fall in this category reported self-reflection and connection with their authentic selves which was meaningful and had impact. For example, participants reported feeling very connected to themselves and doing a lot of working through their existential crisis, yet upon their return, felt unable to hold on to this new self that had been able to connect with a new, more personally meaningful, way of operating in the world. This experience provided empirical evidence against Brown's (2013) idea of travel being a catalyst for on-going sustainable change. These opposing experiences beg the question of what factors impact some feeling more able to hold on to these changes to self and ways of being, whereas others fall back into more familiar yet unsatisfying ways of being.

The first point to make is that travel can be conceptualised as a tool that can be used for working through existential crisis, but that it does not necessarily have to. There are many ways of travelling, particularly those that are more focused on leisure and hedonism, that do not lend themselves to working through existential travel. For some, this may be an acceptable outcome as they do not wish to make long-term changes and are content with the way in which travel offers them temporary respite from existential difficulties. However, given the experiences reported in the data of this study, this is not solely the case for the individuals interviewed here and unlikely to be the reason for the differences in experience of healing and change. Another reason may be the presence of real external and systemic barriers to not being able to live differently. This may be the case. However, given that they have been able to engage at least partially with a change that felt more existentially fulfilling, even if only temporarily, it is worth exploring any other potential internal psychological factors that might have created further barriers to change.

Drawing on the psychotherapy literature that looks at the effectiveness of therapy, a number of possibilities seem plausible. The first is the sense of hope and belief that one can make long-term changes to help resolve the existential crisis, and the resulting commitment to the

process of change. This is reflective of psychotherapy outcome research, that shows that client willingness for change is one of the most significant predictors of positive therapeutic outcomes (Gomes-Schwartz, 1978). This is also linked to an individual's locus of control, and their belief in their ability to impact change. This is backed up by research that has found that individuals with a more internalised locus of control are more likely to have high affective and normative commitment to change (Chen & Wang, 2007).

A second possibility is related the emotional attachments that participants have to ways of being and living that have left them existentially unfulfilled. Whilst travelling, and being physically distant from these attachments, it may have been emotionally easier to temporarily let them go or take a break from them. However, upon return, it might feel too difficult to suffer a long-term loss of these attachments, despite the realisation that they are linked to their feelings of anxiety, low mood and lack of meaning and purpose. Examples of these attachments could be an attachment to a job or lifestyle and sense of self-esteem it affords one, or attachments to close others like family and friends that one feels unable to sever, despite having to sacrifice parts of one's authentic self. From psychology and psychotherapy research, it is known that relationships with others are of primary importance, and that these are difficult to sever even when they are also the source of harm (Yakeley, 2014). This points to the importance of other factors, outside of meaning in life and existential authenticity, that impact people's lives and choices.

Finally, another possibility is simply that at the time of interview, participants were still in the process of understanding the causes and impacts of their existential crisis. Throughout the data, it is apparent that the process of existential crisis and travel is not linear. Instead, travel and existential crisis can both be seen as experiences that happen time and time again, pointing to a more cyclical rather than linear experience. Therefore, it is perhaps more appropriate to conceptualise travel as a useful tool for working through existential crisis, rather than a one-off treatment. This can be seen by participants' expression of travelling on and off again. It is also more aligned with thinking of existential crisis as a holistic experience that impacts all areas of living and is an intrinsic part of the human condition (Cooper, 2016).

The above shows that taking a Counselling Psychology approach to the topic of existential crisis and travel can make a unique contribution to the tourism literature. This is because it is able to capture the potential psychological mechanisms that underlie the positive impact of travel on people experiencing existential crisis in a different way to the facets captured when taking a philosophical or social scientific approach. This process was further aided by this study's approach to sampling. This was achieved by using a homogenous sample based on

having experienced a similar psychological experience, the experience of existential crisis, rather than focusing on a sample where participants experienced a similar form of travel (such as backpacking, volunteering, pilgrimage). This allows one to dig deeper into this particular existential and psychological experience. Furthermore, by adding another discipline to the study of travel and existential issues, it allows one to capture a richer picture and develop a deeper understanding of this phenomenon.

From the point of view of the field of Counselling Psychology, it also provides an example of the benefits of widening its sphere of influence and the value it can bring to other areas of study. However, given that this is a Counselling Psychology doctoral thesis, it is also important to capture the contribution this work can make to the field of Counselling Psychology, in particular any clinical implications this newfound knowledge might have. Having alluded to the clinical implications of these findings throughout this chapter, this will be the topic of discussion in the next section.

4.6. Clinical implications

The above findings have a number of clinical implications that could be of relevance to the field of Counselling Psychology. The first is that the findings make the case for more explicit discussion of the concept of existential crisis within Counselling Psychology and psychotherapy. This is because it can be seen as underlying a number of other clinical presentations, such as anxiety, depression and burnout. By utilising the concept of existential crisis, it provides another conceptual tool for practitioners to better treat the underlying causes of mental health difficulties, and thereby make treatment more effective. This is beneficial because understanding the underlying cause of difficulties, rather than focusing solely on symptoms remission, has been linked to achieving better long-term therapeutic outcomes (Beutel et al., 2012).

With regards to treatment, there appear to be a number of parallels between travel and psychotherapy that could be of useful to reflect on in order to achieve a better, more holistic, treatment plan for client's experiencing existential crisis. The data shows that travel can provide some similar functions to psychotherapy when it comes to reflecting on self, questioning one's assumption and having an open space to explore these questions away from distracting or limiting external influences. Similar to existential psychotherapy, this allows

participants to reconnect with a sense of their authentic selves, and find ways to live in congruence with this self.

Moreover, a number of processes and benefits described by participants align with the 'common factors' of psychotherapy. These refer to the factors across different types of psychotherapy that have been shown to be important predictors of positive patient outcomes (Lambert et al., 1994). These factors are divided into the following three categories: support, learning and action. Support factors include warmth, respect, trust, catharsis, empathy, client/therapist collaboration, reassurance, and decreased isolation. Learning factors include affective experiencing, corrective emotional experience, cognitive learning insight, advice, feedback, and reconceptualization of issues. Lastly, action factors include cognitive mastery, encouragement to face fears, practice, reality testing, behavioural regulation and successful experiences (Lambert et al., 1994). Of all these processes, the experience of travel seems to mostly match the learning and action factors. This makes sense as the support factors revolve mainly around the client/therapist relationship, which is not present during travel. However, it seems that even without a designated other as therapist, the learning and action factors are very much present in the travel data presented. For example, within the 'Connecting with authentic self' superordinate theme, participants describe affective experiencing, cognitive learning insight, feedback and reconceptualization of their issues. Within the 'Living in the present' superordinate theme, participants report corrective emotional experiences, cognitive mastery, facing their fears, practice, reality testing and successful experiences.

Given the direct therapeutic benefits of travel, I would argue it could be of use to practitioners to conceptualise travel in this way and use it to the advantage of the client. This could be done in two ways. Firstly, simply by having the awareness that travel and time away can be of therapeutic value after existential crisis, would allow practitioners to pick up on these points when they are brought to therapy by a client. Here, the therapist can support the exploration of themes such as connection with authentic self, or living in the moment, and explore how to build on this momentum and integrate it into the client's everyday life back home. Another way in which travel could be directly incorporated into the treatment of existential crisis is through the use of retreats. Here, a programme that is informed by the data presented in this thesis may be of use to others experiencing existential crisis. Such a programme would have to provide a framework that gives the physical and mental space to explore and connect with authentic needs and desires, notice internal and external limitations, engage in ways of being that prioritise living in the moment, and explicitly think about how these ideas can be incorporated into life after the retreat.

Having outlined some of the direct therapeutic benefits of travel, I would argue it would also be worthwhile to think about the transferable benefits of travel that can be incorporated into established clinical models. Here, the findings on travel from this study are better made sense of as providing new insights into the clinical treatment of existential crisis by homing in on some of the key differences in approach that may be of use to think about and assimilate into the practice of psychotherapy and Counselling Psychology. In particular, it may be useful to think of how this research on travel can aid the practice of existential psychotherapy, as this is the area of psychotherapy most directly concerned with existential crisis. To do this, it is worth outlining some of the key differences between travel and existential therapy.

The first is the initial point of intervention. When travelling, the first point of change is an external change, one's location and therefore one's physical and social environment. The data suggests that it is this external change that can initiate an internal shift that is beneficial for working through existential crisis. The data also suggests that these internal shifts – shifts in thinking, feeling and behaving – are experienced as coming 'naturally' and easily, without having to deliberately think about them. This shows the power of the environment and social factors in creating internal shifts. This is something that is oftentimes neglected in some traditional talking therapies, including existential psychotherapy, as the nature of sitting in a therapy room where the focus is on impacting the way things are verbalised, means the outside world and its impact are seen as secondary.

However, more recent work in the therapeutic space have recognised the power of the social and physical environment, leading to a shift towards social prescribing as therapy. Here, clients are given access to social and community activities, such as volunteering, gardening or cooking, which are all aimed to foster wellbeing through a holistic approach to wellbeing that includes a person's psychological, social and physical needs (Kilgarriff-Foster & O'Cathain, 2015). In particular, the data suggests that connecting with nature is an important factor in being able to reconnect with one's authentic selves, and therefore important to consider when picking the therapeutic approach (Jordan, 2014). This approach could be of benefit to working through existential crisis, particularly because a large part of existential crisis is the loss of meaning, identity and purpose. These three factors are all deeply impacted by one's external environment, and therefore paramount. This more practical form of intervention may also be more beneficial for people with different learning styles or those who are less psychologically minded, a key predictor of positive therapeutic outcomes (Chalder et al., 2003). Furthermore, it aligns with existential therapies' holistic approach to the human condition, working across not just personal and spiritual dimensions of living, but also social and physical dimensions, such as relationships (community and close others), the body and

the material world. It also aligns with the existentialist ideas of human living as being inherently contextual and inseparable from others and the outside context. Counselling Psychology is well equipped in creating such a way of working with clients experiencing existential crisis as it aligns with its goals of working in an integrative, client-centred and humanistic way (Cooper, 2009).

A second benefit of travel in overcoming existential crisis is the idea of living in the present, and the sense of visceral wellbeing this provided. Here, integrating existential therapy with modalities that foster living in the present, much as Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) could be of use for a number of reasons. Firstly, these tools have been proven to help reduce anxiety, a key part of existential crisis (Ghahari et al., 2020). Furthermore, mindfulness principles have similarities with existential principles and are therefore likely to be of relevance to existential issues. For example, mindfulness purports the importance and wellbeing benefits of focusing on what is currently present, internally and externally, and connecting with this phenomenological experience of living. This again could be of use to working through existential crisis as it focuses on one's experiential and visceral connection with the external world. Furthermore, mindfulness focuses on the experiences of the body, which is similar to the importance that existentialism bestows on the embodied experience (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Lastly, the importance bestowed on mortality and the uncertainty of the future is well aligned with the aims of mindfulness in focusing solely on the present as the only certainty in life (Ghahari et al., 2020).

Lastly, another benefit of travel in working through existential crisis is the focus on forward movement, and the sense of self-efficacy this gives participants. This again comes from being out in the world, and having to act in order to survive physically, emotionally and socially. Here, drawing from therapeutic modalities that recognise the idea of making behavioural changes and reality testing, such as Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) (Cullen, 2008), and that this behavioural change can proceed the emotional change, could be of benefit for creating momentum and the necessary forward movement needed to work though existential crisis.

Taken together, the study shows how the exploration of the therapeutic benefits of travel can lead to new ways of working with existential crisis. The findings corroborate many of the core principles of existential therapy, particularly the importance it bestows on the existential givens and the reflective and challenging exercises that help people see how this impacts them across the different dimensions of living. However, it also shows that making changes to one's social and physical environment, and the way in which this impacts behavioural changes and

connection with the present moment, are important elements that some individuals may benefit from focusing on more whilst trying to work through existential crisis. To do this, it makes the case for integrating existential psychotherapy with other therapeutic models, such as MBCT, ACT and social prescribing, as these have been shown to effective in these areas.

4.7. Strengths, limitations and future research

The main two strengths of this study come from the area of study and the methodology used. Even though there is a plethora of research on the experience of travel and its existential components, there is only limited research looking at this within the field of psychology (Montuori & Fahim, 2004). Furthermore, to the best of my knowledge, there have not been any studies on this phenomenon from a Counselling Psychology perspective. By taking this novel approach, the study was able to add to the existing field of research in a number of ways. Firstly, it was able to examine the experience of travel after existential crisis in an in-depth way that captured some of the underlying psychological processes that may begin to explain the relationship between travel and working through existential crisis. Furthermore, due to the approach taken, the study also captured the experience of participants before and after travel. This shed light on the way in which previous experiences of existential crisis inform the decision-making process to go travel, as well as the way in which the experience of travel impacted participants after travel, and whether the existential working through process was something that participants were able to continue and hold on to. Lastly, given the scope of the thesis, I was also able to look at how findings from this experience could inform clinical practice, and how this could be used to inform an integrative way of working that would benefit clients working through existential crisis.

The second strength of the study comes from the analytical approach that was applied. Here, through the use of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), I was able to capture the richness of the lived experience of the seven participants who took part in the study. This was of course due to their generosity and willingness to be open with me and share their experiences, for which I am very grateful and without which the study would not be possible. Despite the fact that the study only captured the experience of seven people, this rich data can help in providing key insights, some new and some corroborating past research, that can be transferable to understanding the experiences of others who have travelled after existential crisis.

However, as with all approaches, IPA also has its limitations and shortcomings, which will have impacted the study. For example, given the reliance of IPA on capturing participants' experiences in order to inform its richness and validity, participants' ability to be able to articulate their experience in depth is paramount. This is not always the case, and can be impacted, for example, by the level of trust between participant and researcher, language abilities, and social desirability effects (Willig, 2001). Furthermore, ability to verbalise one's inner experience may differ between individuals, which might be impacted by age or education levels (Willig, 2001). Given the adult ages and high levels of education across all participants, the impact of these factors on this study can be said to be minimal. Although English was not the first language of all the participants, English language abilities were very high across the board. However, level of trust and comfort levels expressing their inner thoughts, potentially impacted by social desirability bias or the desire to be a 'good participant', will have varied across participants and are likely to have impacted the resulting data. In order to mitigate against this as much as possible, I made an active effort to keep my language and body language open, remaining curious throughout and emphasising that there were no right or wrong answers.

Another limitation of the study was the fact that there was some heterogeneity within the sample. This is particularly problematic within IPA, as the approach relies on having a small homogenous sample in order to gain a depth, rather than breadth, of knowledge on a particular phenomenon (Smith et al., 2009). The heterogeneity of the sample was based on two key experiential differences. The first was the length of travel, and the second was whether or not participants had returned from travel at the time of interview. Regarding the length of travel, it was determined difficult to establish an arbitrary minimum or maximum period of time, and more important to give voice to all participants whose subjective experience resonated with the phenomenon of travel in response to existential crisis. Although I stand by this decision, the fact that participants' travel experienced ranged from five days to twenty years in length, meant that their experiences will have been substantially different. Regarding participants' return from travel, this mostly impacted their thoughts on the impact of travel on existential crisis, as for those who had returned this was heavily shaped by how they felt after travel. However, despite both of these differences, I was struck by the similarities across people's experiences, which points to the powerful impact of the experience being examined. Nevertheless, a study that uses a more homogenous sample way have captured certain aspects in more depth.

Lastly, another limitation of the study comes from the recruitment process. Given that the majority of participants (six of seven) were recruited through personal social networks, this is

likely to have skewed the sample and therefore the types of experiences that were captured. For example, in terms of demographics, the sample was highly skewed towards an educated, female, urban, white, childless, young adult demographic. This clearly aligns with my own demographic and that of my personal social network. This is a limitation to be aware of when generalising the findings presented here, both within an academic and clinical context. Given the lack of research in this area, this lack of diversity is particularly problematic and should always be kept in mind when evaluating the findings. This is a limitation that would need addressing in future research, for example by a qualitative study looking at the same phenomenon but one that purposively samples to ensure diversity (age, background, gender, family status) of participants. This would be an important piece of work as it would provide a richer and more representative account of the experience of travel after existential crisis, and therefore would be transferrable to understanding the experiences of a greater number of people.

4.8. Concluding remarks

The present study set out to examine the lived experience of travel after existential crisis. It aimed to gain a better understanding of how people who have travelled in response to existential crisis made sense of their experience, particularly in relation to working through crisis and the lack of certainty, loss of meaning and high levels of anxiety that this brought with it. I am very grateful to the participants whose generosity made this study possible and I hope to have done justice to their experience. Furthermore, by taking a counselling psychological approach to this topic, I hope to have added something to this field of research. I also hope to have shown the relevance of this topic to the field of Counselling Psychology, and how it can be applied to help our clients live richer and more fulfilling lives. On a personal note, I have enjoyed immersing myself into this topic and gained a lot more than I initially thought. It has impacted my thinking around my own personal life and how I wish to live it, the type of research I wish to do more of in future, as well as how I wish to practice. For this experience, I am very grateful.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Recruitment flyer



PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR RESEARCH ON TRAVELLING AFTER EXPERIENCING A PERSONAL CRISIS

We are looking for volunteers to take part in a study on going travelling after experiencing a significant personal and existential crisis. An existential crisis is defined as a crisis of living that makes one question the very basis of one's life and its meaning. Examples of such a crisis include but are not limited to: A career crisis, an identity crisis, a breakdown of an important relationship, bereavement, a life changing illness, a near death experience.

As a participant in this study, you would be asked to take part in an online interview to talk about your experience of travel and complete a short questionnaire. The interview will last approximately 1 hour.

For more information about this study, or to volunteer for this study,
please contact: Victoria Zeeb at *Victoria.zeeb@city.ac.uk*

The project is being supervised by Jacqui Farrants, Department of Psychology, City, University of London

This study has received ethical clearance through the Psychology Department's Ethics Committee, City, University of London.

If you would like to complain about any aspect of the study, please contact the Secretary to the Senate Research Ethics Committee on 020 7040 3040 or via email: Anna.Ramberg.1@city.ac.uk

City, University of London is the data controller for the personal data collected for this research project. If you have any data protection concerns about this research project, please contact City's Information Compliance Team at dataprotection@city.ac.uk

Appendix B: Participation information sheet

Title of study: A study on the role of travel in overcoming existential crisis
Principle researcher: Victoria Zeeb
REC reference number: ETH1920-1827

I would like to invite you to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether you would like to take part it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please feel free to ask anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. This copy of the information sheet is for you to keep.

What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of the study is to look at people's experiences of travel after an existential crisis. I am interested in learning about what that was like for you and how travel impacted your feelings of crisis and general wellbeing. The study is being untaken as part of my training to obtain a Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology at City, University of London. The study is due to be completed by September 2022.

Why have I been invited to take part?

You have been selected to take part in this study as you have the kinds of experiences that the study is interested in learning more about. More specifically, you are an adult (18 or above), who has had an experience of existential crisis, subsequently went travelling and has since returned back from the trip.

Do I have to take part?

Participation in the project is voluntary, and you can choose not to participate in the project. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be asked to sign a consent form. However, if you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw any time before without giving a reason.

What will happen if I take part?

Participation will involve a one-off, 45-90 minute interview that will take place over Zoom at a time of your choosing. Before we can schedule the interview, I will communicate (via email, telephone or zoom) to ensure you have all the information you require and are able to ask any questions. The study will then require you to sign and return a consent form before we can

meet virtually to conduct the interview. I will also ask you to complete a short questionnaire that will take no longer than 10 minutes to complete. During the interview, we will have a discussion guided by a number of questions that have been previously written up. However, the structure of the interview is quite flexible in order to make sure we can discuss that you deem most important with regards to your experience of existential crisis and travel. No preparation is required for the interview. Before ending the interview, you will again be given the chance to ask any further questions and thanked for your participation.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

Though I do not foresee any risks in taking part in this study, a number of measures have been put in place to ensure you do not experience any overwhelmingly negative feelings whilst participating in this study. Firstly, you will be given ample information about the study in advance and will be asked whether any topics are off-limits. Secondly, you will be provided with contact details for relevant services that can provide counselling and support, should you require them. Thirdly, you will be encouraged to voice any distress you may experience during the interview and you can take a break or terminate the interview at any point.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

This is an opportunity to experience what is it like to take part in a university research study. It is also an opportunity for your voice and experience to inform academic knowledge on issues of existential crisis and travel, and potentially inform better treatment for others experiencing crisis in the future. Many participants also report enjoying the process of being interviewed as it gives them a rare opportunity to share and reflect on their experiences.

Data privacy statement

City, University of London is the sponsor and the data controller of this study based in the United Kingdom. This means that we are responsible for looking after your information and using it properly. The legal basis under which your data will be processed is City's public task. Your right to access, change or move your information are limited, as we need to manage your information in a specific way in order for the research to be reliable and accurate. To safeguard your rights, we will use the minimum personal-identifiable information possible (for further information please see https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/guide-to-data-protection/guide-to-the-general-data-protection-regulation-gdpr/lawful-basis-for-processing/public-task/). City will use your name and contact details to contact you about the research study as necessary. If you wish to receive the results of the study, your contact details will also be kept for this purpose. The only people at City who will have access to your identifiable information will be the principle researcher. City will not keep identifiable information about you from this study

after the study has finished. You can find out more about how City handles data by visiting https://www.city.ac.uk/about/governance/legal. If you are concerned about how we have processed your personal data, you can contact the Information Commissioner's Office (IOC) https://ico.org.uk/.

What will happen to the results?

The results will be published as part of my doctoral thesis. They may also be used to inform future research papers or book chapters on issues pertaining to existential crisis and travel. Throughout all these publications, anonymity will be maintained. I would also be happy to send you a copy of the final research results. If this is of interest, please just let me know using the contact details given at the end of this information sheet.

Who has reviewed the study?

This study has been approved by City, University of London Psychology Research Ethics Committee.

What if there is a problem?

If upon participation, you have any problems, concerns or questions about this study, you should ask to speak to the principle researcher or a member of the research team. If you remain unhappy and wish to complain formally, you can do this through City's complaints procedure. To complain about the study, you need to phone 020 7040 3040. You can then ask to speak to the Secretary to Senate Research Ethics Committee and inform them that the name of the project is 'A study on the role of travel in overcoming existential crisis'. You can also write to the Secretary at:

Anna Ramberg
Research Integrity Manager
City, University of London, Northampton Square
London, EC1V 0HB
Email: Anna.Ramberg.1@city.ac.uk

Further information and contact details

If you require any further information, or have any questions, please don't hesitate to get in touch with the principle researcher, Victoria Zeeb using the following contact details: Victoria.zeeb@city.ac.uk

Thank you very much for taking the time to read this information sheet.

Appendix C: Consent form

Principle researcher: Victoria Zeeb

REC reference number: ETH1920-1827

Title of project: A study on the role of travel in overcoming existential crisis

		Please tick/ initial box
1.	I confirm that I have read and understood the participant information dated July 2020 for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask questions which have been answered satisfactorily.	
2.	I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw without giving a reason without being penalised or disadvantaged.	
3.	I understand that I will be able to withdraw my data up to the time of transcription.	
4.	I understand that personal information **may** be shared with members of the research and/or the teaching team at City, University of London.	
5.	I agree to City recording and processing this information about me. I understand that this information will be used only for the purpose(s) explained in the participant information and my consent is conditional on City complying with its duties and obligations under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).	
6.	I agree to the interview being audio recorded.	
7.	I agree to the use of anonymised direct quotes.	
8.	I understand that the duty of confidentiality is not absolute and in exceptional circumstance this may be overridden by more compelling duties such as to protect individuals from harm.	
9.	I would like to be informed of the results of this study once it has been completed and understand that my contact details will be retained for this purpose.	
10.	I agree to take part in the above study.	

Name of Participant	Signature	Date
Name of Researcher	Signature	Date

Appendix D: Interview schedule

1. What was going on for you at the time when you experienced your existential crisis?

2. Could you please describe your experiences of existential crisis? What was it like for you?

3. What was it like for you making the decision to go travelling?
    a. What gave you the idea?
    b. How did you decide when, where and for how long to go?
    c. What are the key factors for you (the type of travel, who you do with etc.)
    d. What were you hoping to experience?

4. Could you describe your experiences of traveling?
    a. What did you do?
    b. What was it like for you?
    c. Was it what you expected?
    d. How was it different from your normal everyday life at home?
    e. How did it impact your feelings of crisis/wellbeing?

5. Could you please describe how you feel travel has impacted your life more generally?

    a. Your sense of self
    b. Your outlook on work
    c. Your relationships
    d. Your attitude towards what is important in life

6. Could you please describe what it was like for you to return from travelling?
    a. What was similar/different
    b. What did you miss/not miss
    c. How did it impact your feelings of crisis/wellbeing?
    d. How did it compare to how you felt before you went travelling? What did you gain?

7. Is there anything else you feel like we haven't spoken about that you would like to add?

Appendix E: Questionnaire

1) What is your gender? 0 Male 0 Female 0 Other

2) What is your age?_______

3) What is your occupation? _____

4) What is your nationality? _____

5) Where do you currently live? _____

6) What is your ethnic group? _____

7) Please indicate your highest qualification.

0 O level/GCSE
0 A level
0 Vocational Qualification (please state type and level) ……..
0 Degree/Professional Equivalent
0 Postgraduate degree
0 None of these
0 Other (please specify) .....

8) What best describes your current situation?

0 Employed/self-employed full time
0 Employed/self-employed part time
0 Unemployed
0 Student

9) What is your religion? Please tick the box that best reflects your religion.

0 Buddhist
0 Christian
0 Hindu
0 Jewish
0 Muslim
0 Sikh
0 No religion
0 I'd rather not say
0 Other (please specify) ……..

Thank you for completing the questionnaire

Appendix F: Debrief information

Thank you for taking part in this study. Now that it's finished I'd like to tell you a bit more about it.

The aim of the study is to look at how travel can aid people in re-establishing a sense of meaning and purpose in life that may have been impacted by an existential crisis. A number of previous studies have suggested that travel offers a unique opportunity for self-development by providing the time and space to reflect and shift one's ideas of self and purpose. Furthermore, being at a distance from one's everyday life can allow for a different perspective to shed new light on familiar and habitual ways and ultimately lead to a more fulfilling and authentic way of being. By speaking with you today, it allows me to explore what your travel experience was like and how it might have helped you after experiencing an existential crisis.

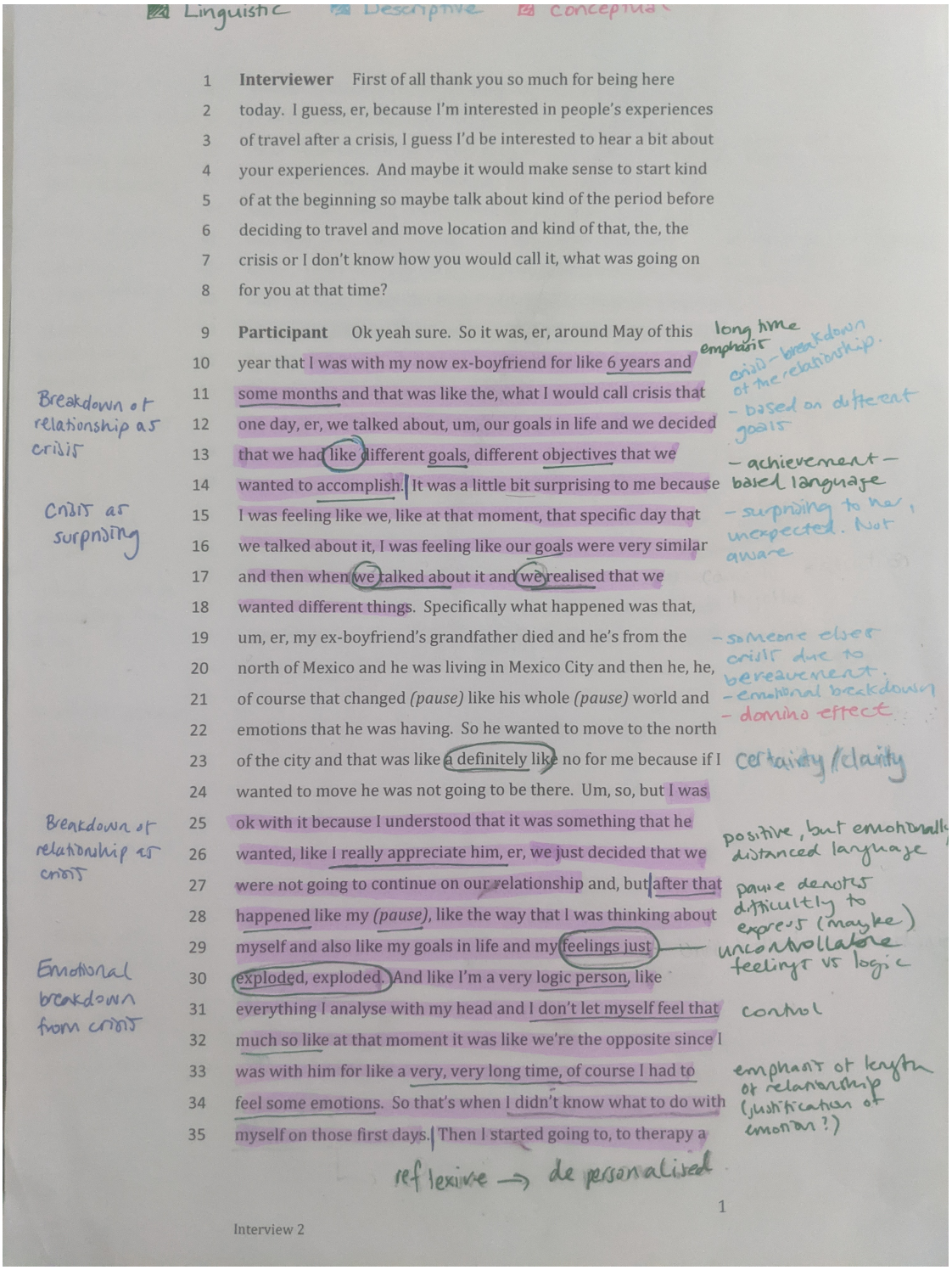
I hope you found the experience interesting. If you have any other questions, or require any support in relation to the topics discussed today, please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor at the following:

Researcher: Victoria Zeeb
Email: victoria.zeeb@city.ac.uk

Supervisor: Jacqui Farrants
Email: j.farrants@city.ac.uk

Ethics approval code: ETH1920-1827

Appendix G: Analysed transcript



Linguistic Descriptive Conceptual

Interviewer First of all thank you so much for being here today. I guess, er, because I'm interested in people's experiences of travel after a crisis, I guess I'd be interested to hear a bit about your experiences. And maybe it would make sense to start kind of at the beginning so maybe talk about kind of the period before deciding to travel and move location and kind of that, the, the crisis or I don't know how you would call it, what was going on for you at that time?

Participant Ok yeah sure. So it was, er, around May of this year that I was with my now ex-boyfriend for like 6 years and some months and that was like the, what I would call crisis that one day, er, we talked about, um, our goals in life and we decided that we had like different goals, different objectives that we wanted to accomplish. It was a little bit surprising to me because I was feeling like we, like at that moment, that specific day that we talked about it, I was feeling like our goals were very similar and then when we talked about it and we realised that we wanted different things. Specifically what happened was that, um, er, my ex-boyfriend's grandfather died and he's from the north of Mexico and he was living in Mexico City and then he, he, of course that changed *(pause)* like his whole *(pause)* world and emotions that he was having. So he wanted to move to the north of the city and that was like a definitely like no for me because if I wanted to move he was not going to be there. Um, so, but I was ok with it because I understood that it was something that he wanted, like I really appreciate him, er, we just decided that we were not going to continue on our relationship and, but after that happened like my *(pause)*, like the way that I was thinking about myself and also like my goals in life and my feelings just exploded, exploded. And like I'm a very logic person, like everything I analyse with my head and I don't let myself feel that much so like at that moment it was like we're the opposite since I was with him for like a very, very long time, of course I had to feel some emotions. So that's when I didn't know what to do with myself on those first days. Then I started going to, to therapy a

Breakdown of relationship as crisis

Crisis as surprising

Breakdown of relationship as crisis

Emotional breakdown from crisis

long time emphasis
crisis - breakdown of the relationship.
- based on different goals
- achievement - based language
- surprising to her, unexpected. Not aware
- someone else's crisis due to bereavement.
- emotional breakdown
- domino effect
certainty/clarity
positive, but emotionally distanced language
pause denotes difficulty to express (maybe) uncontrollable feelings vs logic
control
emphasis of length of relationship (justification of emotion?)
reflexive → de personalised

Appendix H: Mastertable of themes

Superordinate theme I: Seeking external and internal change	
Subtheme 1: 'I need to get out of myself': Feeling trapped in a mundane routine (6 out of 7 participants)	*"you can get quite bored and stuck in this like repetitive wake up, go to work, go out for dinner, go sleep, like go back to work, that you don't fully enjoy, um, routine and it's just it felt like, yeah, it felt like it was this, this, to the point where you start wondering whether that's all there is to, to this great existence"* (Interview 5, ll. 83-88) *"But you know when things aren't fit, you know when a relationship isn't a good fit, similarly with a company, it's like having a toxic partner"* (Interview 1, ll. 652-654)
Subtheme 2: 'I knew I had to go': Intuitive knowing despite fear and uncertainty (7 out of 7 participants)	*"It was difficult. Because I, um, I, I needed to ensure that I could still do some work, um, and, and it was quite, you know, er, it was quite scary, the prospect of (pause) not knowing exactly when I would return"* (Interview 6, ll. 547-554) *"you're setting sail on this little boat and it's kind of the Tom Hanks raft, it's, it's far from seaworthy but it'll do, right, it floats. And you're going out there and all you can see is ocean and you, you just have to trust that as you're going you will become better on the water, you don't really know where you're going but you will see land and you'll get to land and then you'll meet some people and you'll have some experiences and it will, you know, you might come across a map and that helps direct you further on your journey …. it was a case of just getting out on the open water and taking, taking the plunge really and seeing, seeing where it led"* (Interview 1, ll. 293-305)

Superordinate Theme II: Connecting with one's authentic self	
Subtheme 1: 'Who the hell am I?': Self-discovery and reflection (4 out of 7 participants)	*" I've got 6 months, let's figure out what I want to go and do next, what's meaningful to me, what do I value. And actually almost turning it on its head again, who the hell am I, what do I, what do I value in the world, what do I want to go and achieve, what does success look like"* (Interview 1, ll. 249-254) *" I felt that (pause) being with myself was like the best choice that I could have ever done and I think that's part of the travelling side, like when you travel you are, you're basically only with yourself and all the issues that you have and all of the, and also not only the issues, like the things that you enjoy, maybe like watching the sunset, that's like only for you. And that's really, that's really good, like it helps."* (Interview 2, 107-113)
Subtheme 2: 'A different way of being': Freedom to respond to one's own needs (6 out of 7 participants)	*"I think I felt that in Kenya I could be free and maybe that's a bit sad saying that, um, why couldn't I feel free in [England], given that I'd had a perfectly adequate and nice childhood"* (Interview 7, ll.305-307) *"the prospect of travelling and of going somewhere else and being somewhere new and different, in my mind as I'm reflecting on it now, it felt bigger, it felt open, there was space, it felt freeing, there was something about, you know, just, yeah, an opening that was kind of calling, calling me"* (Interview 6, ll. 146-150)
Subtheme 3: Feeling 'at home': gaining a sense of home and belonging	*"Because when you kind of heal I guess you do need to, something needs to feel home even if you're not home, you know, like in the home, home. And you create kind of a home for you, so it's kind of interesting because it*

(3 out of 7 participants)	*was like you need the change but also you need a kind of home, it's just, yeah, I don't know."* (Interview 4, ll. 327-331) *Well I used to go to the orphanage Mass every Sunday so all the children would be there and all the community that I knew, the people that looked after the children, the managers I knew, Sister Name 3, she was Irish I knew, they, they were like my family actually" (Interview 7, 288-291)*
Subtheme 4: Gaining 'spiritual nourishment': Connecting with one's spiritual self (2 out of 7 participants)	*"I've always been quite sceptical of it but there's always been a sort of craving or a longing for something, you know, to connect with something bigger, you know, I'm not religious, nature has always been that for me"* (Interview 6, ll.454-457) *"but in a way you know Kenya did save me, you know, it gave me, and then I feel like (pause), it gave me the spiritual nourishment that I was unable to find in London."* (Interview 7, ll.380-383)
Superordinate theme III: Living in the present	
Subtheme 1: 'Enjoying the purity of the world': Savouring feeling good in the moment (4 out of 7 participants)	*"one of the things I really liked was like really early in the morning or like into the evening where the sun would rise or set, it would shine on the mountain in a certain way so I'd always make a point of like stopping and like watching as it kind of lights up that side of it. So I feel like it almost stripped back a lot of things and I just enjoyed like the pure, the purity of like the world, if that makes sense."* (Interview 3, ll. 566-572)

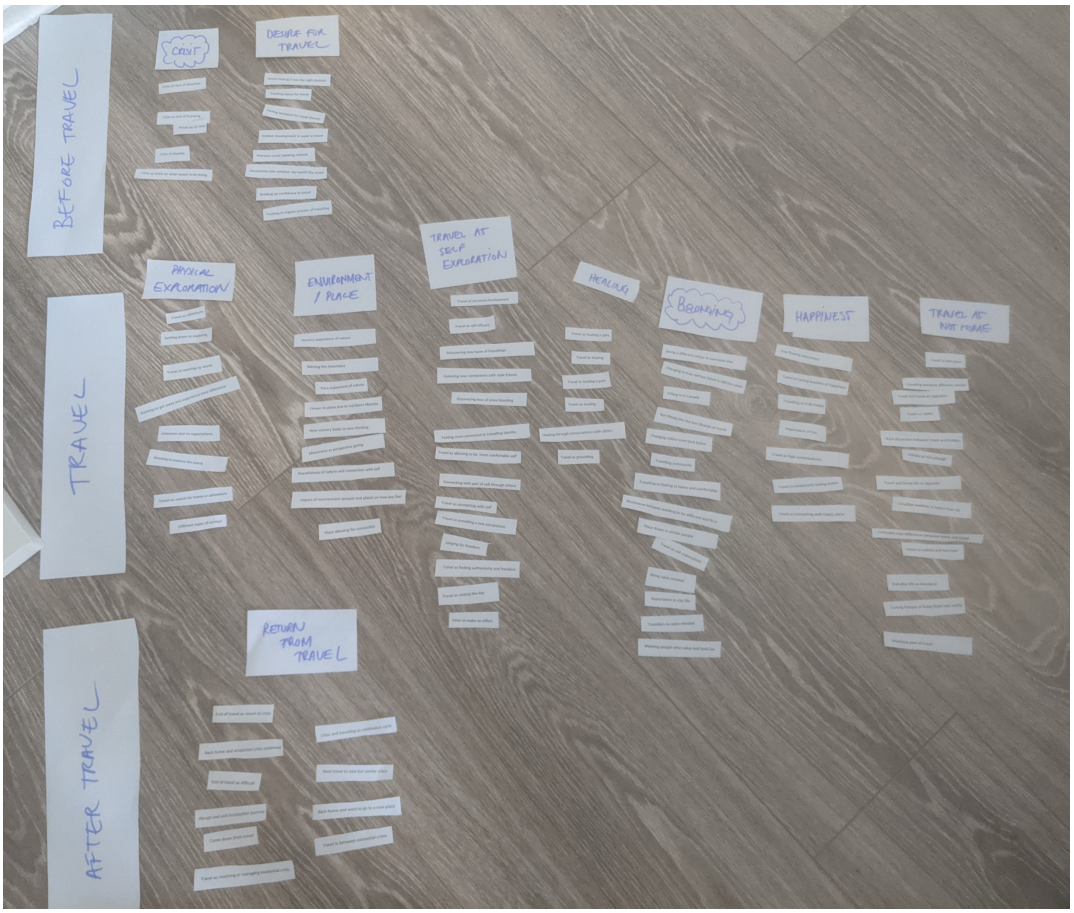
	"So that's one of the things that probably like I learned the most while here because I just, those little things like watching the sunset, smelling the air, that smell of the beach and just feeling like the warm weather, those are things that I used to not, like not think about and not enjoy" (Interview 2, ll. 146-150)
Subtheme 2: Living 'out of your comfort zone': Forcing action, overcoming fears and feeling empowered (4 out of 7 participants)	*"the big thing about going travelling again was like let's get back to basics and prove that you are capable because you went into a Chinese interrogation cell and you came out fine and you can certainly handle any job that's out there"* (Interview 1, ll. 448-452) *"I think especially if you manage to do something like some travelling by yourself or something that is sort of outside of your comfort zone, um, that it also feels like you feel good about I guess having accomplished something and, yeah, you just get this sense of like, yeah, I guess accomplishment and like sort of belief in yourself I suppose."* (Interview 5, ll.189-195)
Subtheme 3: Socialising 'almost like when children interact with one another': Spontaneous positive social interactions	*"… going somewhere new is amazing. Because it's almost like when children interact with one another, when you remove the complexities of language which do enable, like that does enable people making friends and all the rest of it, better communication, but sometimes it's just wonderful to go into a shop and have local people giggle at how silly your accent is and, and it's almost childlike, it's fun and it's, it's innocent and that's nice"* (Interview 1, ll. 688-695)

(3 out of 7 participants)	*"they just said something about my dog and then we just started talking about him and then we started talking about ourselves, like where I was from and where they were from and it was just so natural like, and we just walked the same direction for like 10 minutes and then I needed to like go back. So we just walked, walked and talked for 10 minutes and then I just went back and I said bye to them and, yeah, it's just, it was just so random but so nice at the same time"* (Interview 2, ll. 246-255)
Subtheme 4: Letting the 'future version of yourself deal with the chaos of next year': Being present and lessening anxiety (3 out of 7 participants)	*"…reduce the horizon a little bit, just, just enjoy the challenges and the chaos of right now and let the future version of yourself deal with the chaos of next year and the rest of it"* (Interview 1, ll. 943-945) *" there's also something about cycling in particular … because you're just, like it's all like physical like, yeah, first of all like all new experiences …. you're constantly like tired so you don't really have that much time to, um, really think about, think over, like over-think stuff …. which tends to generally help with, um, with like anxiety and things like that"* (Interview 5, ll. 90-107)
Theme IV: The impact of travel on existential crisis	
Subtheme 1: 'My own way to heal': Travel as processing emotions and healing	*"Maybe, you know, maybe I wanted to escape reality, I don't know, or maybe it was just, I don't know, escaping reality to me sounds like a bit bad … escape reality sounds like avoidance but I don't think necessarily it is avoidance, it's like kind of coping and getting time to process your feelings and stuff, so."* (Interview 4, ll. 68-78)

(4 out of 7 participants)	*"you learn lots of things about other people but it also then reflects back on you learning about yourself as well. So I feel like that's so invaluable, what you get through doing that, that I feel like there's a lot of healing that comes with those conversations with people that you would never, ever meet sort of on a bog standard like every day, because they're in a completely other part of the world"* (Interview 3, ll. 316-322)
Subtheme 2: 'I've had this great experience, so what does this mean now?': Continued feelings of anxiety and crisis (4 out of 7 participants)	*"I think because I'd fallen into that of what am I doing now, like I don't really know where I'm going or what I want to do, that same for me feeling of like existential, again of like what am I doing with life or what, I've had this great experience so what does this mean now"* (Interview 3, ll. 660-664) *"I would say so, like afterwards it's more like I just wanted to get away rather than, yeah, type of, yeah, yeah, so there's that bit but, um, yeah, I would say, yeah, it's definitely more of a during than necessarily like after, I would say."* (Interview 5, ll. 554-558)

Appendix I : Process of creating themes mastertable





Section B: Clinical Case Study

Working Through the Impact of Abusive Family Relationships on Sense of Self: An Object-Relations approach

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Section C: Publishable Article

Finding Your Place in the World:

An interpretative phenomenological analysis of the impact of travel on existential crisis

[This section of the portfolio has been redacted due to copyright issues]

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