“Shaking the profession awake”: Power and Responsibility in Counselling Psychology

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Portfolio for the Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology

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Preface

There are three parts to this portfolio; the first is a qualitative study exploring how talking therapists in the U.K. experience the climate crisis both personally and professionally, the second is a publishable paper disseminating the qualitative study. The final component is a combined case study and process report demonstrating the clinical work I undertook with a female client who presented to a low-cost counselling service with low mood. The common theme between these three components is one of professional power and responsibility.

Part I: Qualitative Study

The first piece of this portfolio is an original piece of qualitative research which was conducted through semi-structured interviews and use of object elicitation. Six U.K. based talking therapists who have experience working therapeutically with climate distress participated. The study employed Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith et al., 2022) to explore how talking therapists experience the climate crisis. Four group experiential themes (GET) were constructed from the data; *alone at the heart of the climate crisis*; v*ulnerability in the face of existential threat; the strain of climate awareness;* and *adapting to the climate crisis as talking therapists*. These findings have been discussed in relation to existing research and theoretical approaches. This study highlights important implications for counselling psychology, recognising the need for the psychology profession to embrace its power and responsibility, and engage meaningfully with the climate crisis.

Part II: Publishable Paper

The second part of this portfolio is a publishable paper which I intend to submit to the Counselling Psychology Review. This journal publishes peer-reviewed research relevant to the work of

counselling psychologists and is part of the British Psychological Society's Division of Counselling Psychology. This paper will focus on one GET, '*Adapting to the climate crisis as talking therapists*'. This acknowledges that this is perhaps the most pertinent theme for counselling psychologists, recognising the power and responsibility we have to support and encourage engagement with this topic. Through choosing this journal that is specifically located within the Counselling Psychology Division, my hope is that it will reach counselling psychologists, including those in positions of power within the BPS who might feel impacted and motivated to act.

Part III: Combined Case Study and Process Report

The final component is a combined case study and process report demonstrating assimilative integration of a Person-Centred host model with Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT). Martha (pseudonym) is the client, a white, working class, able-bodied, cis female who self-referred to the low-cost counselling service I was working at with low mood. After an initial assessment, she had been waiting for a year for therapy to commence. Acknowledging this wait, I chose to initiate our work in the person-centred model partly to support Martha with exploring her experiences at this point, and partly due to my personal preference. As our therapeutic relationship developed, Martha felt comfortable to share her frustration at what she felt was lack of progress, and as such, we discussed integration of CBT. I chose this piece of work because it highlights how the choices I made throughout our therapeutic interactions impacted on our work, enabling me to reflect on my role, and my power, in the therapy room.

Through exploration of the work with Martha, I was able to acknowledge the responsibility and power we hold as practitioners. At micro-levels this can be seen through our choice of therapeutic model or intervention, and at macro-level, this represents the influences of professional power,

for example through the power dynamic that inevitably exists between clients and their therapists. The need for counselling psychologists to be self-aware, especially in relation to power dynamics within the therapeutic relationship, is an ethical requirement (BPS, 2021). This piece of work supported me to develop self-awareness around these issues of power and responsibility.

Power and Responsibility as the Common Theme

The theme of power and responsibility courses through this portfolio. It includes micro levels, which vary from the choices that I have made as a trainee counselling psychologist and researcher, to the macro levels, recognising the power and responsibility we hold as professionals. The participants in the qualitative study emphasised their sense of power and responsibility in relation to the climate crisis, with the findings acknowledging how much more engaged the psychology profession could, or should, be as we all grapple with this urgent global phenomenon. The findings emphasised both the human experiences of personally coping with the existential threat of climate issues, alongside recognising the need for adaptation, that is, our responsibility to evolve professionally as this issue continues to pervade. This acknowledges the power of the collective, of coming together to share and support one another to navigate this issue through our professional identity. The hope is that the publishable paper emphasises this and aims to encourage counselling psychologists to embrace their power and responsibility to engage more with climate issues.

The findings from the qualitative study also highlight the responsibility of counselling psychologists to develop their self-awareness of this topic. If we are not engaged with our own awareness, recognising how we feel about these issues, then we have the power to unintentionally negatively affect our clients' therapeutic experience. The findings highlight how painful and isolating our

experiences of the climate crisis can be, and as such, acknowledging and working with our own feelings is an ethical responsibility as more individuals will inevitably raise climate concerns in practice.

Within the qualitative study, as the researcher, I have had to make many decisions that have influenced the work. More broadly, this includes my choice of topic and methodology, these are reflections of my own interest and theoretical position. I have also had to make more micro-level decisions about semi-structured interview questions for example, again highlighting the power and responsibility I have had throughout this process, and the impact that this could have had on the study. I felt this particularly when constructing the GETs, and this sense of power and responsibility was overwhelming at times. I could feel the power that I held over this research, embracing the responsibility I felt towards my participants, challenging myself to dig deeper and question my decisions, using reflexivity to ensure that I did not take advantage of this power and responsibility.

The clinical piece specifically explores multi-layered issues of power, developing my self-awareness of these. It offered an opportunity to consider how I, as a privileged and educated trainee counselling psychologist, have a role in each of the multiple levels of power dynamics. Indeed, this portfolio emphasises the power and responsibility I hold individually as a trainee counselling psychologist, while also highlighting the newfound responsibility I feel as I become part of the counselling psychology profession. The choices I have made throughout this portfolio reflect the sense of power and responsibility I have felt throughout this process, and my hope is that these reflections are just the beginning, and that I will continue to engage with these issues moving forward.

Part I: Qualitative Study

How do U.K. talking therapists experience the climate crisis?

Abstract

The climate crisis is happening, and yet the majority still struggle to accept its reality and its anthropogenic roots. As research on climate crisis evolves, it has been called a mental health emergency; talking therapists are the front line of support. This qualitative study explores experiences of the climate crisis, both personally and professionally, in U.K based talking therapists. An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis approach was employed; semi-structured interviews with object elicitation were used to collect data from six qualified talking therapists, which included practitioner psychologists and integrative counsellors, who had experience of working therapeutically with climate distress. Transcribed interviews were analysed in line with IPA protocols. Four Group Experiential Themes emerged: *alone at the heart of the climate crisis*; v*ulnerability in the face of existential threat; the strain of climate awareness;* and *adapting to the climate crisis as talking therapists*. These findings are discussed in relation to current research and theories, and implications for Counselling Psychology are discussed.

Key words: *Climate Crisis, Climate Change, Talking Therapists, Counselling Psychology, Power, Responsibility, Social Justice, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, IPA, Object Elicitation*

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Overview

This chapter justifies the need for further research aimed at exploring talking therapist experiences of the phenomenon of the climate crisis by considering the current research on this topic. I begin by presenting my personal interests and reasons for undertaking this research, before briefly explaining my use of the terms 'talking therapist' and 'climate crisis'. This chapter then offers a broad social context, situating the climate crisis, before moving on to the literature review demonstrating the role that psychology, and talking therapists, have to play within the climate crisis. The chapter ends by sharing the aims and rationale for my research question, '*how do talking therapists experience the climate crisis'*.

1.2 My interest and experience

My decision to explore this topic arose towards the end of the first year of the Counselling Psychology Doctorate program; during my first-year placement as a trainee, a client casually brought up the climate crisis in a session. I had not anticipated it coming into the therapy room, and immediately recognised it as a 'blind spot' for me; I felt something when it was mentioned but having not explored this before, I struggled to articulate what this was. At that moment, I felt stumped, and did not know how to respond to my client. I did what most new trainees do, and resorted to reflecting what I had heard, attempting to be with my client and their experience. Yet, this stayed with me, and I realised how uncomfortable I had felt, both in terms of not knowing how to work with such a real threat as the climate crisis, but also because I didn't want to have to think about it!

When I tentatively brought this up in both my personal therapy, and clinical supervision, I recognised my therapist and supervisor's responses were similar to my own with my client.

Although both were compassionate, there was a sense of shared uncertainty, and perhaps of not wanting to go too deeply into this topic. At the same time, a friend began talking to me about her climate activism, and I thought of my experience with my client, recognising the parallel processes that had taken place between us, and my own therapy and supervision, and the sense of discomfort and avoidance. I started to unpack my own experience and feelings around the climate crisis; I have always been deeply connected to nature, relying on long walks through the countryside to think things through and process life events. I recognised that the possible loss of these green spaces was too difficult for me to sit with, and I had been choosing to ignore the problem. I realised that my client's climate concerns had unintentionally elicited a reaction from me, and I needed to explore this side of myself to be able to fully show up for them.

Once I began thinking about this, I began to wonder how others in the psychology profession were making sense of this complex process. As I started to consider this topic as a possible research subject, I did not consider what the broader role of psychology should be, but rather I was guided by curiosity to explore how others in the profession felt, and what this experience was like for them. My motivation has been to consider whether there is a clinical need to improve support for talking therapists to understand and navigate the climate crisis, stemming from my own uncertainty and curiosity.

Recognised within Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), my methodological approach, is the significant role that the researcher plays within their own research (Smith et al, 2009). As someone who is both concerned by the climate crisis, and training to become a counselling psychologist, I am even more aware of my inherent link with this research. To recognise my personal connection to the study, I will use the 1st person within this thesis. I hope that this will allow me to consciously acknowledge the part that I have played, keeping it within my awareness, and committing to transparency throughout.

1.3 Terminology

1.3.1 ‘Talking therapist’

For the purposes of this thesis, I will be referring to the multi-disciplinary of psychology professionals that include practitioner psychologists, psychotherapists, and counsellors, using the umbrella term, *talking therapist*. My hope is that this term recognises that although there are differences between these professions in terms of expertise and training, I believe that the professions are united in fundamental assumptions, such as a level of self-awareness, an appreciation of the subjective experiences of others and desire to support them in managing distress, and an openness to acknowledge the world that we live in.

1.3.2 ‘Climate Crisis’

Climate change refers to significant, long-term alterations in the Earth’s temperature and weather patterns, and it is a phenomenon that has a strong and well-established scientific consensus behind it (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), 2021). While changes to the climate are not a new phenomenon and they have occurred throughout history, it is the human driven, unprecedented rate at which the climate is changing, that has led to what is widely referred to as a *climate crisis.* The United Nations Development Program (UNDP; 2023) defines the climate crisis as, “the serious problems that are being caused, or are likely to be caused, by changes in the planet’s climate” (‘Climate Crisis’ section). Indeed, this term underscores the urgent and potentially catastrophic nature of these shifts, reflecting a growing recognition that the environmental changes driven by climate change are not gradual or incremental but are happening at a pace and scale with severe consequences for both natural and human systems. As such, I will use the term climate crisis throughout this thesis to reflect the urgency of the issue, which is both in line with my attitudes as the researcher, as well as representative of my participants’ attitudes.

1.4 Historical Context of the Climate Crisis and Psychology

Since the 1800s the Earth's average temperature has increased by approximately 1.2°C as a result of human activities, causing significant damage to natural ecosystems and human populations. Most of this increase has occurred since the latter quarter of the 20th century up to now (UNDP, 2023). Some of the early origins of awareness of climate issues can be traced back to scientists such as James Lovelock (1971), who was the first to detect chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) in the atmosphere. These harmful compounds, which are derived from industrial and domestic sources, should not have been present and were found to cause significant damage to the ozone layer. Lovelock's discovery was a pivotal moment recognising human impacts on the environment. Consequently, since the 1970s, there has been a growing movement focusing on environmental health and the human relationship with nature.

The positive impacts that nature has on our psychological health are widely accepted; indeed, there is plenty of psychological research that suggests how far-reaching this can be; not only does it appear to reduce stress (Tyrvainen et al, 2014; Triguero-Mas et al, 2017; Ulrich et al, 1991), and make us feel happier (Zelenski & Nisbet, 2014), but it also works therapeutically to reduce rumination (Bratman et al, 2015), as well as improving our own perceptions of our mental health (Alcock et al, 2014; Kardan et al, 2015). Thus, the link between nature and mental health is well established; however, the extent of positive effects may vary among individuals. Those with a stronger sense of *ecological self*, are likely to experience greater mental health benefits (Bixler et al, 2002; Nisbet et al, 2009).

Ecopsychologists explore the concept of *ecological self* in more detail; a term coined by Arne Naess in 1973, it is the idea that we *are* nature; our interconnectedness with the planet and ecosystems is our ecological self, thus when the natural world is damaged, *we* are being damaged. Naess (1994) is attributed with founding the modern theory of *deep ecology*; a movement that

calls for deeper questioning of our environmental concerns and the assumptions society has about materialism and consumerism. He argues in favour of the ecological self, and a sense of oneness with all things (Naess, 1994). Thus, our relationship with the natural world and our environments are inseparable from our relationships with ourselves and others (Rust, 2020), yet research suggests that there is a general movement towards disconnection from the natural world. Kesebir and Kesebir (2017) comprehensively analysed the words from books, films and music over the last 50 years, and found a downward trend in words associated with nature in each of these cultural spheres. They argued that as people have turned to technology, so our relationship with nature has changed, and humans have become less connected to the outside world, and more connected to the online world. Ecopsychology focuses on healing this relationship between human beings and the natural world (Bragg, 2015).

Despite this important role, ecopsychology has largely been considered a niche field of psychology, and as a result, has been separate from mainstream psychological practice. More recently, as awareness of climate issues have grown, there have been attempts to bridge this gap between psychology and ecopsychology. Milton (2016) argues in favour of ecopsychology being equipped to inform counselling psychologists to develop their understanding of this overlooked relationship between humanity and the natural world. Indeed, he argues that ecopsychology and counselling psychology share key values; not least counselling psychology's commitment to consider the wider psychological landscape, but also the responsibility to challenge injustice (Cutts, 2013), and address discrimination (British Psychological Society, 2020). As such, the evolution of the climate crisis has prompted for deeper exploration of these issues within psychology more broadly, and I argue that understanding individual experiences, particularly from the perspective of talking therapists, will provide valuable and nuanced insights.

1.5 Literature Review

1.5.1 Overview

In this section, I describe my review of the existing literature that relates to the climate crisis and explain why it is important to explore talking therapist experiences of the climate crisis. I present my review of the existing literature much like a pyramid, starting by broadly offering an overview of the climate crisis, followed by discussion of the mental health and wellbeing implications of it. This is followed by an exploration of responses to the climate crisis from the field of psychology, before moving on to review existing literature that considers talking therapist experiences.

1.5.2 Search strategy

Digital searches of databases were conducted through GreenFILE, PsycINFO, and PsycArticles. Each database was searched separately, and subject headings were identified per database which resulted in more appropriate terminology for the relevant database. These search terms were searched individually before incorporating the individual searches together for each database. Using Boolean language, the search terms included ‘climate change’ OR ‘climate crisis’ OR ‘climate emergency’ AND ‘experiences’ OR ‘attitudes’ OR ‘perceptions’ OR ‘feelings’, AND ‘therapy’ OR ‘counselling’ OR ‘psychotherapy’ OR ‘psychologist’ OR ‘psychology’. Results were refined to only include academic literature papers about adulthood, that were in English language. Abstracts were scanned to ascertain relevance, and papers that were most pertinent to this research topic were retained. Citations and reference lists from relevant papers were also searched using Google Scholar. Due to the dynamic nature of the climate crisis and the fast pace of emerging research, post-analysis I replicated these digital searches to include the latest published research.

1.6 Introduction to the climate crisis

The climate crisis has already caused a range of alarming environmental changes, including rising sea levels, more frequent and severe weather events, melting ice caps, and significant ecosystem disruptions. Notably, 2023 saw the highest global temperatures since records began, with July 2024 experiencing two of the hottest days ever recorded (Copernicus Climate Change Service, 2024). It is widely recognised that the excessive rate of these changes is anthropogenic, that is they are a direct result of human activity and consumerism (IPCC, 2021). The IPCC's assessments are based on extensive research, drawing from thousands of studies that collectively demonstrate the profound impact of human activities on the planet's climate system. This research recognises that to slow down the rate of the climate crisis and heating the planet, a meaningful response is needed, and this includes significant individual and systemic changes to both lifestyle and social policy (IPCC, 2021).

The field of psychology has engaged so far with the climate crisis predominantly in several key ways; one has been aimed at exploring perceptions of the climate crisis, considering how to reduce barriers to action and understand how attitudes and behaviours contribute to pro-environmental behaviour (Omotayo Oladejo et al 2024; Adams, 2021). Another way psychology has predominantly engaged with this topic is through exploration of the emotional responses to the climate crisis. Initially I will consider the first, before moving on to the second.

1.6.1 Perceptions of the climate crisis

Psychological literature suggests that we, as humans, would rather deny or avoid the realities of the climate crisis (Weintrobe, 2021; Brulle & Norgaard, 2019). Understanding these attitudes is not only essential for developing effective communication strategies and interventions that can overcome barriers to engagement and action (Maibach et al, 2021). It also offers context for

understanding the role of psychology and the context in which talking therapists are experiencing this phenomenon.

1.6.1.1 Denial/Avoidance

Perception of the climate crisis has evolved significantly over the years. Primarily, it was seen as a distant problem, something that would only affect future generations and other people (Lorenzoni et al., 2006). In an American study exploring risk perceptions and policy preferences of individuals, Lorenzoni et al., (2006) found that risk perceptions of the climate crisis were influenced by experiences including emotion, imagery, and values. The study found that while most people believe that the climate crisis is happening, they do not consider it a priority due to it being more likely to impact places and individuals who are far away. More recently, in a quantitative study, it was found that the majority of individuals (73%) still think that others would be more harmed by the crisis than they would themselves (Leiserowitz et al., 2019).

This sense of psychological distance affects how people are perceiving and responding to the climate crisis; in an essay exploring the psychological responses to the proximity of the climate crisis, the authors suggest that the further away it feels both temporally and geographically, the easier it is to avoid and the less likely it is that people will feel personally affected or motivated to act (Brügger et al., 2015). They indicate that highlighting its proximity will result in various responses based on individual differences and that while in some cases it can increase mitigation and adaptation, it was also found to have no visible effects on individuals, or indeed backfire and cause individuals' distress (Brügger et al., 2015).

There is a wealth of research exploring the widespread denial or avoidance of the climate crisis (Norgaard, 2011; Weintrobe, 2013; 2021), recognising the complexity of engaging with a global

phenomenon that impacts in both significant and ambiguous ways, while underpinned by political divisiveness (Brick & van der Linden, 2018). However, it must be acknowledged that most research into this topic has been from predominantly western, educated, industrialised, rich, democratic populations (Ray, 2021). Consequently, it would make sense for individuals to prefer to embrace a sense of psychological distance if they are physically distant from such issues.

Importantly, the research also primarily focuses on individual experience without fully acknowledging the broader political and capitalist systems driving the climate crisis (Klein, 2014). For example, the role of lobbying organisations and oil companies, combined with governmental complicity, has repeatedly hindered decisive policy action and perpetuated society's reliance on fossil fuels (Brulle, 2018). Acknowledging these power dynamics broadens our perspective on the climate crisis, confronting these systems at the root of the crisis, and underscoring the need for systemic and collective reform, alongside any individual efforts. This could ultimately allow for more effective responses to emerge that might address the challenge (Brulle, 2018).

Indeed, taking responsibility for the climate crisis and its prevention on an individual level can feel overwhelming. It is too complex for most to simply accept; making changes that would affect the very fabric of our lives, from rethinking what we eat, to how we travel, and engage with the world. Therefore, some suggest that this has resulted in a public denial or avoidance of the climate crisis (Weintrobe, 2013; 2021). Not only is this a response to the discomfort that comes from recognising our responsibility within this crisis, but some suggest that it also serves to abate the increasing sense of alarm stemming from the existential threat of the impacts of the climate crisis (Pihkala, 2018).

Research indicates that this sense of alarm can be navigated by individuals oscillating between engaging with the climate crisis and avoiding it. Hoggett and Randall (2018) conducted a qualitative study exploring groups of climate scientists and climate activists. Their findings suggest that one of the ways these groups work through the emotional impact of being so close to the climate crisis is by moving away from the pain and emotion of this reality. They suggest that distancing themselves from the impacts of the climate crisis can be helpful to cope, and emphasise that it is not avoidance or denial, but simply allowing it to move to the background (Hoggett & Randall, 2018). Qualitative research exploring climate activist parent groups in the U.K. supported these findings and suggested that there is a need to disengage from the climate crisis to function in the role of parent (Howard, 2022). These oscillations of experience are perhaps suggestive of a non-linear processing of the climate crisis (Randall, 2009; Doherty, 2018; Hawkins & Ryde, 2019).

Another way that psychology has engaged with the climate crisis is through facilitating societal change on a wider level by offering insight into these psychological processes. Hawkins and Ryde (2019) have offered a theoretical model based on the work of key theorists of climate psychology, and previous research into racism by the authors. This model allows for the experience of oscillation and describes a process of awareness, depicted as cycles that flow retrogressively between denial, grief, anger, guilt, taking responsibility, and becoming an active part of the movement (Hawkins & Ryde, 2019). Although this model has not yet been researched in depth, it offers a helpful perspective suggestive of the way individuals' experience and engage with the climate crisis.

However, as the frequency and intensity of climate-related extreme weather events increase, it becomes harder to avoid the direct threats posed by the climate crisis, and most recently this has been felt across Europe (Cruz et al., 2020; Kale, 2024). In a narrative synthesis and meta-analysis

exploring the impacts of extreme weather events in the U.K. on mental health, findings suggest that there is a high prevalence of mental ill health on those exposed to, or at risk of, extreme weather events (Cruz et al., 2020). While this might mean that total denial of the climate crisis is declining (Milfont et al., 2021), many people still struggle to believe that it is anthropogenic or accept the harm that it will bring (Leiserowitz et al, 2019). Although there has been an increase in people recognising the existence of the climate crisis, there remains a significant gap between this recognition and perceiving it as an urgent issue that requires immediate action.

1.6.1.2 Mediating factors

Psychological research has explored the factors influencing public perception, and these range from economic factors, media coverage, and individual-level factors (Whitmarsh & Capstick, 2018). Individual-level factors include a complex interplay of cognitive, emotional, and social factors (Clayton, 2024), and values, motivations, and political identity have been found to be useful predictors of climate perceptions and climate behaviour (Steg, 2022; Cole et al, 2023). One critical factor is the role of identity, people's beliefs about the climate crisis are often closely tied to their social and political identities (Clayton, 2024). For instance, research has suggested that individuals who identify strongly with social and political groups that are sceptical of climate change are more likely to downplay the severity of the issue regardless of the scientific evidence (Cole et al, 2023). This dynamic can create significant challenges for communication and policy efforts, because addressing the climate crisis requires not only conveying information but also engaging with the values and identities of different social groups (Clayton, 2023).

Despite growing engagement with the climate crisis, silence around the subject pervades in the main, and it has largely remained an undiscussed topic in everyday conversations (Leiserowitz et al, 2019). Some have argued that these difficulties in engaging with the climate crisis can be deemed a type of socially organised denial that result from the complex social and psychological

dynamics involved in shaping public perception, and by extension, the collective response to it (Norgaard, 2006; Brulle & Norgaard, 2019). Social interactions can affect perception (Whitmarsh & Capstick, 2018), and the perceptions we have about how those who are important to us feel about the climate crisis also impact whether we can accept its reality or not, perhaps due to issues of shared social identities (Clayton, 2024; Pearson et al., 2016). Indeed, research suggests that those who are more conscious of the climate crisis will more readily recognise extreme weather events as being a result of the climate crisis, but for those who do not, there is a sense of disconnect from what is happening (Van der Linden, 2015). Further, those who perceive inaction or dismissal by political figures experience increased psychological distress and fears of the future (Ma et al., 2019). This suggests that how others perceive the climate crisis matters, and the social context in which we align ourselves is an important mediating factor to our experiences of the climate crisis.

This section has considered some of the ways that psychology has engaged with the climate crisis so far, exploring the context of denial and avoidance in which much of society has colluded, and in which this thesis has been developed. Talking therapists likely come from a range of backgrounds and probably identify with a variety of social and political groups that influence how they will interact with the climate crisis. Yet it has been argued that talking therapists should acknowledge the social and political contexts that contribute to the backdrop of therapeutic work (Winter, 2023), and as such this serves to unite talking therapists through recognition of the social context of our profession. Indeed, given that the climate crisis has been described as the biggest threat to mental health in the coming century (Charlson et al, 2022), it seems that talking therapists should be acknowledging this influence. As such, another way that psychology has engaged with the climate crisis has been to explore its impact on mental health and wellbeing, and the next section considers this.

1.7 Mental health and wellbeing impacts of the climate crisis

As the environmental problems caused by the climate crisis become more evident, it is inevitable that there will be serious implications on mental health and wellbeing. A significant feature of the IPCC report (2022) emphasises with high confidence the mental health challenges that will accompany the climate crisis. The multifaceted impact of the climate crisis on mental and emotional wellbeing has been explored in recent years and research highlights various pathways through which it affects mental health.

Indeed, in an essay published by Susan Clayton (2021), she argues that climate change affects mental health through four pathways: direct impacts, indirect impacts, psychosocial effects, and the influence of personal perception. She considers both the discrete events and the gradual changes which seem to have a direct impact, such as the extreme weather events ruining livelihoods, or destroying homes which can lead to depression, suicidal ideation and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD; Cruz et al, 2020; Rataj et al, 2016). Gradual environmental changes such as increases in temperature have also been linked to increases in suicide rates, and aggression (Thompson et al, 2023; Miles-Novelo & Anderson, 2022). The psychosocial effects include inequality, economic and food insecurity and involuntary migration, which have links to depression, anxiety and PTSD (Munro et al, 2017). Finally, Clayton acknowledges how our own perceptions of the climate crisis can lead to increased distress and anxiety of the problem, suggesting that awareness of the climate crisis and its future risks can have a detrimental effect on mental health and wellbeing (Doherty & Clayton, 2011; Clayton, 2020; Clayton, 2021).

1.7.1 The rise of climate emotions

Increasingly, there has been collective recognition from the media, teachers, and healthcare professionals who are reporting rises in emotional responses to the climate crisis, and the emergence of what have been dubbed ‘eco-emotions’ in the U.K. (Pihkala, 2022a; Simon, 2021).

In a 2022 U.K. poll, 74% of adults reported feeling very or somewhat worried about the climate crisis, and it was recognised as the second biggest concern facing adults after the cost-of-living crisis, indicating the potential significance of the climate crisis impact on mental health and wellbeing (Office for National Statistics, 2022). The available evidence overwhelmingly supports Clayton's (2021) suggestion that our own perceptions of the climate crisis can negatively affect wellbeing (Lawrance et al, 2022; Ojala et al, 2021). These impacts manifest in a variety of ways and so far, the research of climate emotions has predominantly focused on varieties of anxiety and grief, highlighting the deep psychological impact it can have on individuals (Pihkala, 2022a).

The complexity of the experience of climate emotions are underpinned by a variety of emotional and psychological processes, for example, the awareness of the indirect, broader existential threat posed by the climate crisis can evoke a profound sense of hopelessness, which is a key feature of depression (Hayes et al., 2018; Berry et al., 2010). Based on literature reviews of current research, postdoctoral researcher Dr Panu Pihkala (2022) has developed an initial taxonomy of climate emotions, such as eco-anxiety and ecological grief presented below. Although the taxonomy is not a systematic review of the research exploring climate emotions, it recognises which emotions are most prominent in the literature and offers a helpful starting point to consider how broadly the climate crisis impacts on mental health and wellbeing.

1.7.2 Emotional responses to the climate crisis

1.7.2.1 Eco-anxiety

Eco-anxiety is arguably the most common term developed in recent times, used to encompass the diverse and complex emotional responses that arise from perceptions of the climate crisis (Pihkala, 2022a), and rooted in concerns about the future of the planet and the perceived inability of individuals to avert environmental catastrophe (Clayton, 2020; Hickman, 2020). While some have argued that the term eco-anxiety could be used as an umbrella term, and a useful way to

describe the overall experience of living through the climate crisis (Pihkala, 2022a), individuals describe a wide variety of emotional responses, which is not limited to anxiety (Hickman et al., 2021).

Further, some suggest that the term eco-anxiety could unnecessarily pathologise these experiences through its inclusion of the word ‘anxiety’ (Cunsolo & Landman, 2017). In a systematic analysis exploring the relationship between death and the environment, Pihkala (2018) argues that the existential threat of the crisis acts as a reminder of individuals mortality, and this should not be pathologised or avoided. Indeed, the concerns raised over pathologising eco-anxiety recognise the need for researchers in this field to be cautious not to medicalise a reasonable emotional response to an arguably systemic issue resulting from cultural norms beyond the scope of individual responsibility (Barnwell et al, 2020). As such, I appreciate that while eco-anxiety is a useful term that can represent a broad range of experiences, it remains essential to acknowledge the individual differences in how people experience and process their emotional reactions to the climate crisis (Adams, 2021; Hogg et al., 2021).

Looking at this more closely, experiences of eco-anxiety have been described as including various emotions such as despair, depression, hopelessness, guilt, powerlessness, shame, anger, and existential dread (Hayes et al., 2019; Pihkala, 2022a). Clayton and Karazsia (2020) sought to explore the intricate nature of eco-anxiety and found a strong connection between eco-anxiety, and depression and generalized anxiety disorder. Their study introduced a four-dimension scale that highlighted how eco-anxiety impacts both cognitive-emotional processes, such as rumination, and social functioning, including the ability to work. Interestingly, their study also found that eco-anxiety can lead to adaptive responses, such as pro-environmental behaviours and a strengthened environmental identity. This indicates that, despite its distressing nature, eco-anxiety can motivate constructive action. Indeed, Ojala et al. (2021) adds to this literature by

differentiating between worry and anxiety, with her findings suggesting that worry is a more helpful emotion to engage critically with problem solving.

However, the study by Clayton and Karazsia has been critiqued for relying heavily on participants' self-evaluations of distress, potentially limiting the depth of understanding of their emotional experiences (Hogg et al., 2021). Hogg et al. (2021) argue for the development of more nuanced tools that delve into the qualitative aspects of individuals' experiences with the climate crisis and eco-anxiety, rather than relying on measures that may oversimplify this complex emotional response.

Despite these critiques, Clayton and Karazsia's findings have been supported by subsequent quantitative studies, which also found that eco-anxiety negatively correlates with mental well-being and is a predictor of psychological distress (Ogunbode et al., 2022). Indeed, most studies agree that feelings of ambivalence, helplessness, and powerlessness remain significant aspects of eco-anxiety (Pihkala, 2022a). In a recent global study exploring children and young people's beliefs about government responses to the climate crisis, 56% of participants reported feeling powerless, and 51% expressed feelings of helplessness (Hickman et al., 2021). Although this study's focus is on young people (up to age 25), the results are supported by qualitative studies exploring the experiences of the climate crisis in adults, from a variety of populations, ranging from farmers (Howard et al, 2020) to climate scientists and activists (Renouf, 2021; Hoggett & Randall, 2018), to inhabitants of small islands most likely to be most affected by the climate crisis (Kemkes & Akerman, 2019; Gibson et al., 2020). Participants in these studies also shared their sense of feeling disempowered and helpless (Kemkes & Akerman, 2019). The findings from these qualitative studies also suggest that there is a sense of uncertainty amongst participants about how the climate crisis could be slowed down, and that it is impossible for individuals to manage this obstacle alone (Renouf, 2021; Hoggett & Randall, 2018).

The emotional responses discussed above which have been explored through both qualitative and quantitative research emphasise the pervasive impact of eco-anxiety on individuals' wellbeing, highlighting the struggle of the experience, and the complex sense of helplessness associated with it. It also indicates the need for more exploratory approaches to understanding the individual experiences of the climate crisis.

1.7.2.2 Ecological grief

Beyond eco-anxiety, the climate crisis has also given rise to the term *ecological grief*, described as a deep sorrow felt in response to environmental loss or anticipated future losses (Pihkala, 2022b). A global study revealed that 42% of participants felt grief in relation to the climate crisis (Hickman et al., 2021). Further, the term *solastalgia*, coined by Australian philosopher Glenn Albrecht, has been used to describe the specific personal experience of losing one's home environment to the impacts of the climate crisis (Albrecht et al., 2007). Although similar to ecological grief, it is more widely used to describe the distress caused by specific, personal, environmental changes and the loss of something that was once an absolute certainty to an individual (Albrecht et al., 2007; Pihkala, 2022a).

Research suggests that this grief can be prompted by the destruction of natural landscapes, the extinction of species, or the disruption of ecosystems (Cunsolo & Ellis, 2018). Authors of a perspective article exploring the concept of ecological grief suggest that for indigenous communities and those with strong connections to the land, ecological grief can be particularly acute, as these losses are intertwined with cultural identity and heritage (Comtesse et al, 2021). As such, ecological grief can profoundly affect an individual's sense of identity, as environments that hold personal meaning change or are lost, so too is the construction of their identity that surrounds that meaningful environment (Comtesse et al, 2021).

Studies have shown that solastalgia is associated with various negative mental health outcomes, including depression, anxiety, and a sense of helplessness (Stanley et al., 2024). A recent mixed methods study by Stanley et al. (2024) explores the aftermath of wildfires in Australia and found that solastalgia was associated with higher levels of PTSD, anxiety, and anger, further highlighting the direct impact environmental changes have on mental health. Yet they also note that strong emotional responses are common, should be expected, and are a sign of morality and consciousness (Stanley et al, 2024). Further emphasising that these emotional responses should not be viewed through the lens of pathologising understandable responses to the climate crisis.

1.7.2.3 Anticipatory emotions

In an exploration of emotional reactions to the climate crisis, Böhm (2003) distinguishes between prospective and retrospective consequence-based emotions. The prospective emotions, which included fear and worry, were experienced when individuals anticipated the negative effects of the climate crisis, for example, degradation of environments. They concluded that there seemed to be more anticipatory concern, than there was retrospective i.e., regret for past events (Böhm, 2003).

The notion of anticipatory climate emotions is supported in more recent literature that recognises individuals' experiencing climate distress having not witnessed any climate disaster events themselves (Clayton, 2020). A quantitative study explored experiences of anticipatory solastalgia, examining a sample from both the U.K. and United States, supporting the existence of anticipatory solastalgia, and finding that it is prevalent in those with higher levels of climate distress, and who are expecting significant changes to their environments as a result of the climate crisis (Stanley, 2023). This research highlights the impact of anticipating the threat of the climate crisis, and the

ongoing stress of living in an increasingly unstable environment, which can all contribute to chronic stress and trauma (Samuel et al., 2022; Doherty & Clayton, 2011).

1.7.2.4 Adaptive responses

Yet while most research emphasises the negative impacts of the climate crisis on wellbeing, it is important to recognise the adaptive nature of some of these emotional reactions (Pihkala, 2022b). For example, in recent quantitative research, eco-anxiety has been positively linked to pro-environmental behaviour and increased individual and collective action in relation to the climate crisis (Ogunbode et al., 2022; Curll et al., 2022). These studies reinforce earlier research suggesting that individuals with higher levels of nature connectedness who experience climate-related anxiety or distress, are more likely to adopt adaptive coping strategies (Ojala, 2007; 2021). Indeed, qualitative research exploring the lived experience of climate experts in Australia, found that they were able to remain hopeful through drawing on their social connections and knowledge, focusing on hoping for the possibility of changes such as technological advancements and shifting lifestyles (Renouf, 2021). These findings emphasise the complexity of the emotional responses to the climate crisis and suggest that personal values and concern for the environment can mediate responses and encourage pro-environmental action to overcome them.

1.7.3 Implications of climate emotions

As we have seen, research highlights a range of human emotional responses to the climate crisis, which talking therapists may well encounter in the therapy room. Exploring the full spectrum of mental health and wellbeing implications is beyond the scope of this study, but this section offers a broad overview of some of the more common responses that impact on mental health and wellbeing arising from the climate crisis. The mental health implications are vast and varied, and research on the topic continues to evolve (Pihkala, 2022a). Although many quantitative studies have explored climate-related emotions and impacts on mental health, they have often relied upon

individuals' self-recognition, making it difficult to fully capture certain emotions, such as anger, shame, or guilt, which can be harder to publicly acknowledge (Stoknes, 2015; Hoggett, 2019; Pihkala, 2022a). Qualitatively, the research has been helpful to understand the specific experiences of various populations, and together, they are a useful starting point to understand broadly what the issues are, and how individuals are experiencing the climate crisis, enabling further engagement with this topic.

1.8 How is this being responded to by talking therapists?

As our understanding of the direct and indirect mental health impacts of the climate crisis deepens, acknowledging the diverse implications of it is crucial for the evolution of talking therapists as they help navigate this global challenge. As clients start to bring these issues into the therapy room, it is essential that as clinicians, therapists have had the space to consider their own position so as not to unintendedly dismiss client concerns or emotional responses.

Additionally, given the relational nature of the work undertaken by talking therapists, and the valuable role that understanding the wider social and political context of a client's experience plays within these professions, it is vital that talking therapists acknowledge the effects of the climate crisis. In fact, more than simply acknowledging, it seems that it is a *responsibility* of talking therapists to consider themselves at the heart of these fundamental social experiences, showing leadership as to how to engage with the climate crisis (Wainwright & Mitchell, 2021). As such, this research focuses on talking therapist experiences rather than the experiences of others, and this section explores how talking therapists have so far responded to the climate crisis.

1.8.1 Ecopsychology

Incorporating ecopsychology into therapeutic practice has been one way that talking therapists have responded to the climate crisis. An example of this is counselling psychologist, Professor

Martin Milton (2017), who describes his experience of integrating ecopsychology into his therapeutic practice. He held sessions outside in a park to work with a client who was experiencing anxiety, grief, and guilt as a result of the climate crisis. He argues the value of developing awareness of our interconnectedness with nature, and this process being key to facilitating sitting with the pain and powerlessness that comes from these climate emotions. Although this was not formal research, it offers a valuable perspective of what can happen when talking therapists engage with their clients in this way, enabling clients to engage with their more painful emotional experiences, while embracing their connection with nature.

The therapeutic value of this sense of connection via nature is further supported by qualitative research conducted by Budziszewska and Jonsson (2021), two psychotherapists in Sweden, who explored their clients' climate concerns within therapy. They found that through mutual connection to nature a sense of 'relatedness' is created, and it is in part the loss of this relatedness that drives feelings of anxiety within their participants. Thus, this highlights the significance of the response from talking therapists who are engaging with ecopsychology to work with clients experiencing climate distress.

1.8.2 Connecting with emotions

Connecting with the emotional experience of the climate crisis is an important process to enable capacity to manage the difficult feelings that it brings (Pihkala, 2022b). For talking therapists, the best response to a client presenting with any distress related to the climate crisis is to profoundly listen, allowing a clients' full experience to be heard and shared (Buzzell & Chalquist, 2010). To do this effectively, it is asserted that a talking therapist should have engaged comprehensively with their own personal and professional understandings of the climate crisis and its impacts on them, so as not to unintentionally harm the clients' experience (Hickman, 2020). Interviews conducted with individuals with direct experience of the climate crisis emphasise the value of

listening and learning from them and their experiences of what it is like to exist alongside the climate crisis (Hickman, 2020). Hickman advocates that this should be honoured and explored before moving away from this experience or offering any interventions for managing eco-anxiety.

In an interview with psychotherapist Steffi Bednarek (2019), she shares her experience of working with clients who are regularly exposed to climate crisis information. She explains that most of these clients felt isolated due to others inactivity, and she describes their experiences of helplessness and isolation being further exacerbated by mental health professionals pathologising their feelings. While this does not have the rigour of formal research, it nonetheless provides useful information and Bednarek emphasises the responsibility of talking therapists to sit and connect with these feelings in order to educate themselves, and better support their clients. Indeed, psychotherapist Linda Aspey (2021) also discusses how difficult it might be for talking therapists to engage in climate crisis conversations if they are unwilling to recognise their own feelings on the topic first. These informal discussions are supported by a survey of mental health professionals who shared that they felt they needed to be conscious of their own emotional experiences of the climate crisis in order to best support their clients (Seaman, 2016).

Having said this, developing awareness of this issue is not easy; individuals who become engaged with the climate crisis will have to explore and process complex and painful emotions (Weintrobe, 2021). Indeed, the research suggests that clients are unlikely to initiate conversations about their climate crisis concerns within the therapy room (Hasbach, 2015). Perhaps social norms prevent individuals from recognising their own emotional experiences in relation to the climate crisis (Stoknes, 2015; Norgaard, 2011). As such, it is vital that talking therapists situated to provide therapeutic support are aware of these experiences, and how to work with them in practice, yet few clinicians feel they are prepared to work with such issues (Seaman, 2016).

1.8.3 Ethical Responsibility

There has been a notable increase in talking therapists using their psychology backgrounds to engage with the climate crisis on multiple levels (Wainwright & Mitchell, 2021; Barnes et al., 2022). For example, in May 2019 the British Psychological Society (BPS) responded to climate change being labelled an emergency by acknowledging the need of psychologists to work to ensure effective behaviour changes could be implemented (BPS, 2019). That same year a paper was written asking specifically if counselling psychologists are doing enough to fight climate change, it was a call to action to use the skills learned through training to work with clients and the wider community to understand how the climate crisis is impacting society's mental health (Gimalova & Milton, 2019).

This increasing engagement with climate issues is reflected in several key developments within the field, for example the inclusion of climate-related issues in the BPS Code of Ethics (2018). Additionally, in July 2021 the BPS Division of Counselling Psychology conference had a strand focusing on the climate crisis, reflecting recognition of the growing importance of this issue within the field. Further, climate and environmental crisis steering groups have been established within both Clinical and Counselling Psychology Divisions of the BPS. Beyond the BPS and more formal channels, some psychologists have aligned themselves with the activist movement in response to the climate crisis. One example of this would be the Extinction Rebellion (XR) Psychologists group. This group has been campaigning in a variety of ways from peaceful protests to teaching and working with the professional bodies to demand that those in positions of power urgently address the climate crisis (XR Psychologists, 2024).

Like the BPS, the UK Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP) has acknowledged the importance of addressing climate-related distress within therapeutic practice. In a statement, the UKCP emphasised the need for therapists to engage with the emotional and psychological aspects of

the climate crisis, offering training and resources to help professionals navigate these complex issues (Coward, 2020). On an international level, the American Psychological Association (APA) has also created a task force specifically to prioritise the climate crisis and encourage practitioners to be more engaged with addressing its psychological impacts (APA, 2022). These developments indicate a global recognition within the psychology community of the need to address the climate crisis and raises questions as to the role of psychology when it comes to issues of social justice and supporting the more vulnerable members of society.

A growing critique of mainstream psychological approaches to the climate crisis suggests that there is an overemphasis on the individual building resilience and acceptance, which arguably fails to address the underlying social and systemic causes of eco-anxiety and climate related distress (Rhodes & Dunk, 2023; Kalwak & Wiehgold, 2022). Individuals are located within broader political and social systems, and as such, should be recognised as individuals in context (Winter, 2019). This critique highlights the need for psychology to embrace a social justice perspective, recognising that the impacts from the climate crisis are not shared equally across populations (IPCC, 2022). Vulnerable populations, and those in lower socio-economic brackets are often the most affected, but the least responsible, for climate crisis issues, giving rise to injustice, inequality, and disempowerment (Adams, 2021).

This highlights a need for collective understanding and engagement from the various psychology disciplines in relation to the climate crisis, although there are suggestions that the field of psychology has been slow to address these social and political issues so far (Barnes et al., 2022). A paper appealing for an urgent call to action authored by mental health professionals urges greater involvement from psychological professionals and highlights the pivotal role they can play as leaders in addressing the climate crisis (Li et al, 2022). While there might be some reluctance in engaging with something that is so closely related to social policy, it is argued that engagement

with the climate crisis is not a political act, but rather an ethical responsibility that is closely aligned with the core values of the profession (Samuel et al., 2022). The adage ‘the personal is political’ further reinforces that, as talking therapists, we must not isolate our work within the therapy room but rather actively acknowledge and respond to the broader societal context in which we and our clients exist (Winter, 2019). In doing so, talking therapists can bridge individual practice with collective action, ensuring our professional engagement with the climate crisis remains both grounded in our ethical responsibility, and our social and political contexts.

1.9 Talking therapist experiences of the climate crisis

So far, we have seen the wide range of emotional responses to the climate crisis, as well as something of the response to this from the psychological community. If talking therapists are to respond effectively, at each of the levels discussed, it seems important that talking therapist experiences can be explored and understood.

Talking therapists find themselves in a unique position, as they both personally experience the climate crisis and are expected to support others who are grappling with the same overwhelming phenomenon. This situation is particularly challenging given the intersubjectivity inherent in therapeutic practice, where therapists are often drawn to certain areas of work and can be personally affected by clients’ struggles. Intersubjectivity is a concept embraced in counselling psychology; it postulates that individuals and their experiences cannot be separated from the context of their interactions with something or someone (O’Brien, 2010). In this context, the role of self-awareness in therapeutic practice is crucial. However, the climate crisis stands out as a universal issue, it affects everyone, albeit in different ways, across the globe. Consequently, therapists must navigate the dual challenge of processing their own experiences while simultaneously holding space for their clients’ experiences. As more clients seek therapeutic support for distress related to the climate crisis (Seaman, 2016), talking therapists must be

prepared to engage with this complex work, balancing their personal and professional roles effectively.

The post-analysis literature review revealed recent research from Australia exploring talking therapist experiences and their results focused on the complex interplay between personal and professional experiences. The researchers discussed the dialectical tension that arises from talking therapists being in this position, highlighting the need for them to reflect on their personal experiences and develop their self-awareness, and suggesting that talking therapists who can acknowledge their own climate related concerns are better equipped to support their clients (Silva & Coburn, 2023). While this research offers helpful insight into talking therapist experiences, it is a study from Australia where the direct impacts of the climate crisis have arguably been more apparent so far, therefore their experiences cannot be generalisable to account for U.K talking therapist experiences.

Several theoretical papers exist that emphasise challenging talking therapists to consider the context of the climate crisis, and value of the natural environment on mental health (Higley & Milton, 2008; Milton 2010). While that is a useful way to draw necessary attention to the topic, these papers do not explore how talking therapists themselves experience the climate crisis. In a mixed methods study considering the relevance of the climate crisis to mental health clinicians, Seaman (2016) questioned 158 talking therapists based in the United States. The results indicate that although the climate crisis was not frequently brought to therapy by clients, when it did come into the therapy room it could be a significant source of distress for those clients. Further, Seaman's findings suggest that the personal responses of talking therapists will impact how they respond to clients who bring this subject into therapy, and consequently, talking therapists feel ill-equipped from training to deal with this topic in practice (Seaman, 2016).

Further, a recent study exploring psychology trainees' experiences in Canada found that personal environmental justice beliefs and the degree to which environmental issues were discussed during training and supervision predicted the use of eco-therapeutic interventions in practice (Vera et al, 2024). Eco-therapeutic interventions refer to therapeutic conversations that explicitly address the climate crisis and its connection with mental health, indicating that individual differences have a significant effect on experiences of the climate crisis as practitioners.

In a small informal survey, forty counselling psychologists were asked to share their engagement with the climate crisis (Milton et al, 2020). The results indicated that 55 per cent of the sample had experienced clients bringing material related to climate change, confirming the need for an awareness of the climate crisis within the field of counselling psychology, and more broadly as talking therapists. It was also noted that most participants acknowledged the need for counselling psychologists to engage with the climate crisis and accept responsibility to generate awareness of the issue and the possible psychological implications. However, the authors acknowledge that the survey was not formal research and was intended more to get a general sense of counselling psychology perspectives. Thus, this highlights both the need for further research and the gap in the literature for an in-depth study exploring the experiences of U.K. based talking therapists in relation to the climate crisis.

More recently, a paper was authored by eight mental health professionals with the intention of sharing their personal and professional experiences of the climate crisis. The paper describes their ongoing reflections of this phenomenon and starts by acknowledging their sense of disruption at recognising the urgency of the climate crisis. They acknowledge the existential challenges they have faced arising from this growing awareness, as well as the impacts this has had on them both personally and professionally. They identified the negative impact it was having on their sleep, as well as their feeling isolated and frustrated at work where they felt the climate

crisis was not fully acknowledged. They also reflect on the ways they have adapted and grown from this experience, highlighting the value of connection with others, as well as using their professional skills to support them through this experience (Samuel et al, 2022). These case studies reflecting their personal experiences offer rich insight but as with the previous informal survey, lack the rigour of more formal research, emphasising the need for more formal research in this area.

So far, most research has focused on experiences of the climate crisis more broadly and its impact on mental health and wellbeing. Given the dual role of talking therapists, situated to both experience these impacts and work with clients doing the same, it seems relevant and important to understand talking therapist experiences of this phenomenon. Although there exists a recent study exploring Australian talking therapists' experiences, there are none that specifically explore talking therapists in the U.K. where climate issues are becoming more apparent, but there remains a sense of silence around the issue.

1.10 Aims for the current study

This chapter has intended to offer a review of the current literature that considers experiences of the climate crisis. It has considered the scientific background to the climate crisis, and public perceptions recognising that although there continues to be growing awareness of these issues, climate silence and avoidance is pervasive and complex. I have explored the research in relation to experiences of the climate crisis, considering various impacts that these have had on mental health and wellbeing, recognising the vital role that talking therapists will need to play in this. Consideration has been given to extant literature exploring talking therapist responses to the climate crisis, and recognition has been given to the unique position of talking therapists as both mental health professionals who will face the climate crisis implications professionally, as well as individuals who will have personal experience of the phenomenon.

The current study aims to clarify and explore talking therapists' lived experiences of the climate crisis. In this study, I conceptualise 'experiences of the climate crisis' as the diverse ways individuals perceive and feel about the environmental changes that are occurring and their impacts both socio-politically and personally. I am interested in exploring and asking the question, *what is this like for them*, encompassing their emotional responses, their beliefs and attitudes, and their behavioural or coping strategies. By considering their experiences of the climate crisis in such a multidimensional way, I aim to gain an in-depth understanding of how talking therapists understand and are engaging with a rapidly changing world.

Not only does this research aim to offer talking therapists a space to explore their experiences of the climate crisis, giving voice to them, I hope that this will add to the range of psychological voices within the climate crisis literature. My aim is that this research will contribute to the growing body of qualitative studies exploring experiences of the climate crisis and that it will support the discipline of psychology to engage further with these vital issues at a critical time. I hope that this research will also support talking therapists to navigate these issues, supporting them to be more engaged with this topic through connecting with the findings and implications of this study.

1.11 Research Question

How do U.K. talking therapists experience the climate crisis both personally and professionally?

Chapter Two: Methodology

2.1 Overview

This chapter presents how the study intends to answer the research question: How do U.K. talking therapists experience the climate crisis both personally and professionally? The research adopted a qualitative methodology of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). This chapter begins by providing a rationale for using a qualitative approach, before moving on to a discussion of my epistemological and ontological stance. Then follows an overview of IPA, a rationale for my use of IPA, and a consideration of other methodologies. The IPA research process will then be discussed in more detail, alongside procedural aspects of the study, and ethical considerations will then be explored. Finally, I will evaluate the quality and validity of the research against key quality indicators. Reflexivity is considered throughout the chapter.

2.2 Rationale for using a qualitative approach

As we have seen in Chapter 1, psychological research exploring the climate crisis is growing at a fast pace, largely emphasising the negative consequences for mental health (Charlson et al., 2022). Talking therapists are situated in the distinct position of perhaps having experienced the climate crisis phenomenon not only within their clinical work, but also as individuals, as the phenomenon gathers pace. To understand the nuance of this experience, it seems appropriate to begin exploring subjective experiences, which allow for more insight into diverse and unique participant frames of reference. Exploring this group qualitatively allows for a rich account of their experience and will enable us to consider how they make sense of the climate crisis (Willig, 2013).

2.3 Theoretical Aspects

Within qualitative research, it is essential to acknowledge that my assumptions and beliefs will underpin not only the development of the research, but also the interpretation of findings (Willig, 2013). Therefore, recognising and exploring my ontological and epistemological positions, which are the *assumptions* I make about the world, and what can be *known* about the world, are an essential part of the research process. Willig (2013) suggests asking three questions to help identify the epistemological and ontological roots of a study:

1) What knowledge do I intend to produce?
2) What kinds of assumptions am I making about the world?
3) What is my role within the research process?

I endeavour to answer these questions in the sections below.

2.3.1 Epistemological position

Epistemology is concerned with recognising what knowledge is, and how it is used to make sense of the world (Willig, 2013). To consider my epistemological position, I asked myself what kind of knowledge I intend to create from this study.

This study aims to create knowledge that is unique to the participants and uncover subjectively what their experiences of the phenomenon are, i.e., this study aims to understand how individuals have constructed meaning around their experience of the climate crisis. So, rather than judging if their subjective experiences are an accurate depiction of a reality, my interest is in exploring their version of knowledge. Thus, epistemologically I recognise that there is not one knowledge to know, but multiple that can be known (Langdridge, 2007).

Therefore, the knowledge being produced by this study is phenomenological, and focuses on the experiential world of individuals. This acknowledges that although individuals experience the same objective world, they construct meaning that will be unique to them, and is valuable to investigate (Langdridge, 2007). It is through understanding their experiences and the meanings they assign to them, that I believe rich knowledge about phenomena can be found.

There are two major approaches to phenomenological research in psychology – descriptive and interpretative. Descriptive phenomenological knowledge broadly believes that meaning is found within the actual experience and stays close to the participant account (Willig, 2013). Interpretative phenomenology embraces the hermeneutic tradition and recognises that to engage in descriptive, there will always be an element of interpretation (Willig, 2013). This approach engages researcher conceptions and perceptions and argues that we need to allow that engagement to inform our analysis, thus embracing the role of the researcher. As I considered my role within the research process, I recognised myself as someone who is both concerned by the climate crisis, and training to become a counselling psychologist, acknowledging my inherent link with the research and recognising the value of embracing that role within this research. Therefore, in the context of this research question, I situate myself and my knowledge seeking assumptions within the interpretative phenomenological position.

2.3.2 Ontological position

Ontology considers the assumptions that are made about the world. To understand my ontological position, I considered what kinds of assumptions I was making within my research question (Willig, 2013).

My interest is in exploring individuals making sense of their experience of phenomena, and consequently, I believe that there is a reality that can be known. However, I recognise that

experiences of phenomena are mediated by expectations, previous experiences, knowledge, thoughts, and judgments (Willig, 2013). To me, this means that although phenomena exist, they exist differently, and have different meanings, for everyone. For example, climate change exists, and it has been known and discussed for many years. While some people remain sceptical of it, others see it as an existential threat – I argue that these opposing realities are mediated by the fabric of a person's world. Therefore, ontologically I assume that there is an objective world out there, but that individuals both consciously and unconsciously create their own realities, which do not necessarily reflect this objective world (Yucel, 2018). Therefore, rather than seeking objective truth about phenomena, this study assumes there to be a variety of interpretations of phenomena.

The individual accounts of participants' experience might confirm some form of reality for them, however, to better understand these experiences, researcher engagement and interpretation of them is essential. Through a process of discovery, my aim is to access the participants' meanings and sense making of the phenomena, implicating my own perspectives and meaning of the phenomena. These assumptions position me within critical realism, which stemmed from Roy Bhaskar (2008) who posited that it is necessary to critically examine a person's subjective experiences to make sense of the core structures of their experiences of phenomena.

2.3.3 Epistemological and ontological reflexivity

Willig (2013) highlights the importance of *epistemological reflexivity*. She argues the value of reflecting upon our theoretical assumptions to recognise how these might influence our research. As I developed my understanding of theoretical stances, I grew conscious of the array of labels that could be assigned and became wary of ascribing myself to one too soon. Willig (2013) acknowledges that it can be challenging to engage with the process of understanding our own epistemological and ontological stances and then to categorically state that position. Initially I

found it more comfortable focusing on situating my research within an ontology and epistemology, rather than myself.

To better engage with it, I considered my role as a trainee counselling psychologist and reflected on the beliefs that I bring to the therapy room; I value a person's lived experience, and I accept that there is the possibility of more than one way to know the world, i.e. one person's experience of depression will be different to another's. This fits within the critical realist ontology, and phenomenological epistemologies, acknowledging that individuals are unique, and that multiple factors influence the experiential world.

As my research has developed, I have become more confident with my theoretical stance, particularly because it recognises my own impact on the research. A reflexive attitude has been necessary because my assumptions, expectations, and experiences all contribute to how I have interpreted the participants' accounts. Reflecting on these and my motivations to undertake this research has been part of this process, and reflexivity is considered throughout this chapter.

2.3.4 Overview of IPA

I have used IPA to explore how U.K. talking therapists are experiencing the climate crisis personally and professionally. Developed in the mid-1990s by Jonathan Smith, IPA has philosophical foundations in phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography (Smith et al, 2009). IPA was influenced phenomenologically by the work of Edmund Husserl. His focus was on exposing the essence of the human experience of phenomena through transcending our preconceptions, and adopting a *phenomenological attitude* (Eatough & Smith, 2017). This notion was developed further by philosophers Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre who individually suggested a more holistic approach to phenomenology, proposing that people are immersed within a world in which their context, embodiment and relationships all have an impact upon an

individual's interpretation of their being (Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). Thus, highlighting that individual's make sense of a phenomenon based upon the rich context of their own lives, and researchers must bracket their preconceptions to uncover the meaning participants give to the phenomenon (Smith et al, 2009).

Heidegger went on to propose that concepts within phenomenology must be interpreted to be understood fully, and this is where hermeneutics have influenced IPA (Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). IPA recognises the hermeneutic circle, and the double hermeneutic as part of the research process. Both concepts enable IPA to embrace the layers of interpretation which go into exploring the lived experience of participants (Eatough & Smith, 2017). The hermeneutic circle outlines that we cannot make sense of the whole until we have understood the parts, and vice versa. The researcher is encouraged in this way to work iteratively with their data to thoroughly examine it, while ensuring they remain open to considering it from various perspectives, as both the whole and the parts (Eatough & Smith, 2017). The double hermeneutic meanwhile recognises the role that the researcher's own assumptions play within analysis and acknowledges that the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant, as the participant is trying to make sense of the phenomenon (Smith & Osborn, 2007).

Rooted in the participant experience, IPA aims to uncover through researcher reflexivity, bracketing preconceptions, and interpretation, the sense of meaning participants have given to a phenomenon (Langdridge, 2007). This highlights another major influence on IPA – idiography. IPA's commitment to focus on the *particular* allows for an in-depth, intensive exploration of a purposive sample, ensuring that research is grounded in the lifeworld of participants, before considering any similarities between participants that might come from the data (Eatough & Smith, 2017).

2.3.5 Rationale for choosing IPA

My choice to use IPA stems predominantly from my own theoretical stance, which as I have acknowledged, is as a critical realist, seeking interpretative phenomenological knowledge. IPA emphasises sense making, that is, being able to explore in great depth what has been said by the participant, acknowledging that people are complex beings (Smith & Osborn, 2007). So, IPA allows for an in-depth understanding of the subjective experience of the participant, with various layers of interpretation, which enables a more thorough exploration of the research question.

Another strength of IPA is that it accepts my role within this study. As discussed within the overview above, IPA embraces the double hermeneutic and accepts it as part of the richness that comes from the exploration of the participant experience. This encourages the researcher to recognise their own thoughts and assumptions in order to engage fully with the participant's interpretation of their own experiences (Eatough & Smith, 2017). Thus, embracing the process of reflexivity and positioning the double hermeneutic as a strength that enriches the creation of knowledge.

I appreciate that IPA makes no assumption that there is a 'right' way of experiencing phenomena, and this resonates with my way of thinking, stemming from my training in counselling psychology, as well as my clinical work. Through incorporating idiography, IPA's commitment to smaller sample sizes, allows for valuable insights which although not suitable for providing generalisations, can contribute to wider conversations (Pringle et al, 2011). When it comes to exploring how the phenomenon of the climate crisis has been experienced by individuals, research is still growing; by adopting an IPA methodology, research in this area can begin to develop with a firm grounding in individual experiences, which could deliver impactful research (Smith & Osborn, 2007).

2.3.6 Consideration of methodologies

Choosing an appropriate methodology is vital for qualitative research, and initially I considered two methodologies in particular – Constructivist Grounded Theory and IPA.

These two methodologies share a considerable overlap (Smith et al, 2009). Both aim to analyse and generate knowledge that is grounded in the data, while acknowledging the role of the researcher's theoretical assumptions and interpretation. They also aim to get a rich view of the participant's world (Langdridge, 2007). However, Constructivist Grounded Theory aims to develop explanatory theories about social processes as they occur, while IPA aims to gain insight into the psychological world of participants (Charmaz, 2006; Smith et al, 2022). I felt that IPA's insight into the psychological world would be more appropriate to the research question, and that Constructivist Grounded Theory might miss the nuance of how talking therapists *experience* the climate crisis, and for this reason, this methodology was dismissed.

During the initial stages of the analysis, I was also compelled to consider a third methodology – Reflective Thematic Analysis (RTA). During the exploratory noting and constructing experiential statements steps of my first case using IPA, I found myself focusing on more thematic noting, rather than phenomenological and experiential. It lacked the depth of exploratory noting required for IPA, and I began to produce broader thematic statements rather than experiential statements that focused on *what it was like* for the participant.

After some reflection, RTA was considered; it is part of the Thematic Analysis family of methodologies, and as in IPA, it particularly embraces the role of the reflexive researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The focus is on developing themes across cases; however, it lacks the emphasis on the particular and unique details of each case, as with IPA. Through reflection and discussion with my supervisor, I recognised that my work commitments were impacting upon me and the

analysis due to my work in health psychology predominantly being based on CBT and more active processes, rather than experiences as such. After consideration of RTA, I dismissed it, with a renewed focus on the value of engaging with the more unique, idiographic and in-depth IPA analysis. Given that experiences of the climate crisis are complex, and research in this area is still growing, the nuance that IPA offers is important for gaining insight into the diverse and unique experiences of this phenomenon (for further discussion, please refer to 'Personal Reflexivity' in this chapter).

2.3.7 Reflexivity in IPA

The impact of my role within this study is highlighted within IPA; as the researcher I am not only designing the study, but also generating the data through interpreting the participants lived experiences. My impact could both enrich and hinder this process (Smith et al, 2009). Consequently, it is imperative that I can acknowledge and be transparent about my personal motivations and attitudes towards the topic throughout this research process, from design, to analysis and write up. This is what Willig (2013) refers to as *personal reflexivity*.

As reflexivity is an integral part of IPA, I have kept a diary to be able to reflect on my own assumptions, thoughts, and feelings throughout the research process. This exercise has allowed me to recognise how connected I am to this research question. As my own awareness of the climate crisis grows, I feel overwhelmed by what there is to do. By attempting to understand the crisis specifically through the eyes of talking therapists, I believe my motivation is that this study can in some way support humans as we evolve to cope with the repercussions of what will be felt from environmental damage. By focusing on the talking therapist experience, I hope that this research will offer support to those who are uncertain about how to engage with the climate crisis and encourage more conversations about the crisis. Ultimately, empowering more of us to engage in these conversations, both privately and publicly.

2.4 Procedural Aspects

2.4.1 Recruitment

As I began my study, the intention was to focus on Counselling Psychologist experiences in line with our own discipline, however, after several months without participant interest, I had to ask myself why I was focusing specifically on Counselling Psychologist participants. It was largely due to concerns about homogeneity of experience, Counselling Psychologists receive comparable training across providers, and hold similar values, which I felt would moderate for any heterogeneous variables. I also assumed that this pool alone would more than fulfil my participant recruitment requirements. However, recruitment for this study has been slow (which I discuss further in 'Personal Reflexivity'). Due to these factors, I therefore amended the inclusion criteria and research question, gaining ethical approval to recruit more broadly practitioner psychologists registered with HCPC, and counsellors and psychotherapists accredited to BACP or UKCP.

I began recruiting initially through contacting the BPS Division of Counselling Psychology, sharing my research information through their monthly e-newsletter. I also targeted working spaces of practitioner psychologists, counsellors and psychotherapists, such as therapy rooms with recruitment flyers (Appendix E), and I enquired about mailing lists and asked for my research information to be shared widely. I explored online groups for therapy professionals and ecopsychology groups, sharing recruitment flyers within those, if permitted. I also began posting via a researcher account on X (previously Twitter). I contacted various organisations with a focus on environmental issues, including XR Psychologists, and the Climate Psychology Alliance, and they shared my recruitment flyer on their platforms.

Once participants had initiated contact with me, I shared the participant information document (Appendix D) for them to review, and to answer any queries they might have. Once they acknowledged that they understood the study and what will be asked of them, confirming that

they would like to proceed, I asked them to review and sign the informed consent forms electronically (Appendix C). All participants chose to sign this electronically and email it back to me prior to interview, and the consent form was also reviewed during the interview process. In accordance with confidentiality requirements and data protection legislation, the consent forms are stored anonymously and securely on the City University One Drive (for more information see 'Ethical Considerations' later in this chapter).

2.4.2 Participant recruitment criteria

IPA does not assert a definitive sample size, although the commitment of this methodology to an idiographic model means focusing in-depth on fewer participants (Smith & Shinbourne, 2012). Studies have been published with sample sizes ranging from one to fifteen or more (Smith & Osborne, 2007). More recently, it has been suggested that a sample size of ten to twelve participants would be suitable for a doctoral study (Smith & Nizza, 2022), however, it is also recognised that a sample of between six to eight participants is suitable within a student study, which aims to balance the level of labour involved, with a detailed exploration of data (Smith & Osborne, 2007). Ultimately, due to the recruitment issues that I encountered, alongside time constraints, this study recruited six participants over fifteen months. Although the preference would have been for more participants, this number allowed for an in-depth analysis of data.

IPA makes use of a small purposive sample to look in detail at the similarities and differences of participant experiences of the same phenomenon, so it seemed sensible to attempt to make this small sample of participants as homogeneous as possible to mitigate for conflicting variables (Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). However, this is largely open to researcher interpretation, and thus the degree of homogeneity can vary between studies (Smith et al, 2009). I'm conscious that my own research question is open, and within the purposive sample of practitioner psychologists, psychotherapists, and counsellors, there will be a level of heterogeneity reflected. I have

deliberately chosen to embrace this heterogeneity, because I believe that the professions are united in fundamental assumptions, such as an awareness of other's subjective experiences, an openness to the world we live in, and a level of self-reflection, that I hope will ensure the sample will be sufficiently homogeneous, while still allowing for a rich collection of experiences.

To create this sample, participants were recruited based on the following inclusion criteria:

- Qualified practitioner psychologists, psychotherapists, counsellors registered with either HCPC, BACP, or UKCP.
- Based in the U.K. and English speaking.
- Currently active in clinical work.
- Experience of clients bringing any level of concern about the climate crisis.

2.4.3 Recruited participants

Six participants were recruited. Their professions are included in the Table 2-1 below, alongside their pseudonyms which are used throughout this study. Due to oversight of its potential utility, demographic information was not collected for this study. Upon reflection, it became evident that such data would have added valuable nuance and relevant information to the research. However, since interviews were already underway, this omission could not be rectified at that stage. If I were to replicate the research in the future, I would prioritise obtaining demographic information from the outset.

Table 2-1.

Overview of participants and their professions. Names are pseudonyms used throughout.

Name	Profession	Name	Profession
Heath	Educational Psychologist	Hazel	Integrative Counsellor
Jasmine	Clinical Psychologist	Rose	Educational Psychologist
Lily	Counselling Psychologist	Fern	Counselling Psychologist

2.4.4 Data collection

Participants were interviewed online over Zoom, a protected and encrypted application. The interviews were recorded with Zoom, and this was transferred immediately and kept securely on the City University One Drive.

2.4.4.1 Working online

I chose to conduct online interviews for several reasons; given the post-pandemic uncertainty, I felt it might be more comfortable for participants to take part without having to travel or meet in person. As well, if circumstances changed and we were faced with a lockdown, I would still be able to conduct interviews. Secondly, I'm aware that talking therapists are busy, and thus, meeting online is a convenience and therefore might incline more interest from possible participants. Thirdly, the online format has become one that we have become accustomed to, and perhaps more comfortable with, having moved online during the pandemic. Finally, I am conscious that the climate crisis might be an issue that my participants are actively engaged with, thus meeting online might reduce the carbon footprint of the interview, which could encourage participation.

2.4.4.2 Semi-structured interview

Given IPA's focus on the phenomenological data, it seems that a data collection method that allows participants to offer rich, unique, and detailed accounts of their experiences is key (Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). Semi-structured interviews are the most popular tool within IPA because they provide a setting in which the participant and researcher can engage in real dialogue with open ended questions, which can assist participants in describing their experiences (Willig, 2013). Semi-structured interviews also offer a flexibility to follow the participant throughout the conversation and discover interesting and perhaps unexpected areas (Smith et al, 2009).

The development of an interview schedule is encouraged within IPA, so that the researcher can consider what they hope to cover in an interview, as well as becoming aware of any difficulties that may arise (Smith & Osborn, 2007). My interview schedule has been designed as more of a prompt, so that I can ensure the topic of interest remains central to the conversation (Appendix D). I developed the questions at the start of this project, based on what I felt were key areas of interest. I then shared my list of potential questions with my supervisor to review, so that these could be discussed to ensure their relevance to the topic. The questions have been deliberately considered to ask the participants to describe or reflect, rather than including anything that could be perceived as leading or including any kind of judgement or value base (Langdridge, 2007).

However, I'm aware that while semi-structured interviews offer participants an opportunity to explore their experiences, an interview schedule will inevitably be impacted by my own assumptions and beliefs, and this might not only influence the substance of the interview, but possibly also the conclusions of the study. With the aim of mitigating for this as much as I can, I have opted to include the use of object elicitation.

2.4.4.3 Use of object elicitation

Participants were invited to bring an object to the interview that they considered to be representative of their personal experience of the climate crisis. It was made clear to them, that this could be any object, including photographs. They were asked early in the interview to present their object and describe its relevance to them and their experience of the climate crisis.

Willig (2016) reflects on the use of object elicitation within a phenomenological study and finds that there are some advantages to its use. Perhaps most importantly, she found that using an object to uncover participant experience, allows them to frame the phenomenon themselves, before responding to researcher questions, which were inevitably created from my frame of reference. Secondly, she recognised that choosing an object allows participants to engage with the topic before the interview and reflect upon what the topic means to them specifically. Finally, IPA acknowledges that while there is a connection between what people say and what they think and feel, it can be a struggle to express these feelings (Smith & Osborn, 2007). A critique of IPA has been its reliance upon language being a sufficient method to capture these experiences, so through recognising the phenomenon within an object, it provides participants an opportunity to not rely on language alone to describe their experiences; an object gives them something concrete off which to base their reflections (Willig, 2013; Silver, 2013).

Willig (2016) emphasises that the interviewer focus is on the participants' relationships with their objects, and the meaning assigned to them by the participants, rather than attempting to interpret the objects themselves as part of the analysis process. This is reflected in my findings chapter, where although I offer a descriptive representation of the various objects that were brought to interview, I do not attempt to interpret meaning in them. The objects act as a stimulus for the participant reflections about what the climate crisis means to the individual participants, rather than as a symbolic meaning in and of themselves.

2.4.5 Ethical considerations

This research aims to comply with ethical guidelines for research laid out by the British Psychological Society (BPS) and British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) (BPS, 2021; BACP, 2019). To ensure that this research complies with ethical standards, it has been approved by the Psychology Ethics Committee at City, University of London. Participant information, including consent, processing and anonymisation of data, is safeguarded and held as governed by the 2018 General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), (BPS, 2021).

2.4.5.1 Working online

As mentioned within Data Collection above, interviews were conducted online, over Zoom. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the British Psychological Society's Code of Human Research Ethics was updated to include research conducted online (BPS, 2021). So, it has been essential to consider practical and methodological ethical issues that may have arisen using this format. For example, to address issues of confidentiality I ensured that we were in private spaces, and that I wore headphones, and I invited my participants to do the same. As well, participants were sent a unique password to access the interview 'room'. I was also mindful of preparing participants in case there were interruptions or issues with disconnections, and we agreed what we will do in such instances before the interview commenced.

2.4.5.2 Participant risk and consent

Participants are all over 18 years old and considered 'low risk' in terms of vulnerability and safeguarding needs. This topic could be emotive, and although the risk of this is low, there is still a risk of distress. Talking therapists go through rigorous training, developing self-awareness and reflexive skills, to ensure they can safeguard themselves with emotive topics. However, if for some reason this topic did cause distress, I ensured that the participants were given sufficient information about the area of research beforehand, by sending the participant information

document, and ensuring I answered any questions throughout the process (Appendix D). I also asked them to read and sign a consent form that highlighted several aspects that they should be aware of, for example that the interview can be stopped at any time for breaks, or that they can withdraw their consent to participate at any time without needing a reason for doing so (Appendix C). We also reviewed this information verbally during the interview.

2.4.5.3 Personal information and Data Management

2.4.5.3.1 Confidentiality

Participant identities were anonymised at the point of transcription, and identifiable details changed or removed to preserve confidentiality. If participants shared examples of any clinical material, they advised me that this was anonymised. As an additional safeguard, at the point of transcription any identifiable information from any examples was altered. This was done two weeks after the interview.

2.4.5.3.2 Consent Forms

These contain identifiable names, and are held separately to other research material, on my online City University OneDrive, under password protection, until the course requirements are fulfilled.

2.4.5.3.3 Email addresses

Participants were asked if they wished to receive the disseminated study and indicated this via the consent form. Those who wished to, consented to the retention of their email address for this to be sent to them. For those who did not wish to, their email addresses were deleted after the two-week period from interview, to ensure they had time to withdraw if they wished.

2.4.5.3.4 Audio recordings

Audio recordings of the interviews will be kept securely on City University OneDrive until the course requirements are fulfilled, after which time they will be deleted.

2.4.5.3.5 Transcripts

Transcripts have been anonymised, and participants allocated a pseudonym, they are stored securely on City University OneDrive for 10 years.

2.4.5.3.6 Participant Object

Participants agreed to the anonymised sharing of their object, and this was on the consent form, and discussed verbally during interview. Due to the possibility of some objects being identifiable, I have shared indicative visual representations in the appendices to aid the reader in getting a sense of the objects, these are as close as possible to the original objects while maintaining anonymity (Appendix J).

2.4.5.3.7 Data withdrawal

Participants were made aware that they could withdraw from the study at any point before, and up to two weeks after, the interview. This information was on the consent form, and I also informed them of this during the interview.

2.5 Data Analysis in IPA

Within IPA, the analysis of data aims to make sense of the participant's world; finding meaning within the transcript will require the researcher to engage in interpretation (Smith & Osborn, 2007). IPA is characterised by an iterative process, and the researcher must ensure they maintain an open mind, as they move within and between their participants data; from the particular to the shared experiences, and back again, and from the whole to the parts (Smith et al, 2022). Individual

transcripts are analysed one by one focusing on the unique participant experience. Although access to the participant's subjective experience is partial, IPA aims to develop a detailed understanding of the individual's particular experience, exploring each case from a researcher perspective, before moving to more general statements (Larkin et al., 2006).

Participant accounts are then considered more broadly within the 'whole' and alongside other participant experiences to uncover themes and patterns, grounded in the data, and through researcher interpretation, reflecting IPA's hermeneutic foundations (Willig, 2013). Before moving back to the parts and delving back into the participant experience to gain a deeper level of understanding through micro-analysis and interpretation of participants data. The final stage of the analysis process is the write up. Here, the group experiential themes are described, and illustrated with extracts of participant's transcripts, before linking to existing literature within the discussion (Smith & Shinebourne, 2012).

IPA does not have a prescriptive method for analysis, and there is no right or wrong way to analyse data, yet Smith et al. (2022) outline some of the common steps involved in this type of phenomenological analysis. These key stages of analysis have been outlined in Table 2, and further detail for each stage is shared below (Smith et al., 2022).

Table 2-2.

The Stages of IPA Data Analysis. Adapted from Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2022

IPA technical description	Steps I took for each case
Step 1: Reading and Re-reading *Immerse in the data*	· Transcribe recordings and immerse myself in the data. · Read and re-read the transcriptions, while listening to recordings. · Stay close to the participant's account. · Write brief summaries of each transcript, including my initial reactions and thoughts.
Step 2: Exploratory Noting *Note observations and reflections*	· Describe content of the text and things that stand out – description, linguistics, and interpretative comments. · Note observations about particular meanings of particular sections if warranted. · Acknowledge the meaning of the text and stay close to the participants words.
Step 3: Constructing Experiential Statements	· Transform initial notes into experiential statements. · Ground these statements in the participant's account. · Begin to develop more conceptual formulations.
Step 4: Searching for connections across experiential statements	· Group together based on conceptual similarities.
Step 5: Naming Personal Experiential Themes	· Provide names to describe characteristics of the clusters of statements.
Step 6: Continuing individual analysis of other cases	· Repeat the above processes for each participant. · Create a table of themes for each transcript. · Remember to keep an open mind, to allow new themes to emerge with each transcript.
Step 7: Developing Group Experiential Themes *Consolidate themes across participants*	· Each table of themes is reviewed and cross-referenced with the transcripts. · Patterns across transcripts are identified and grounded in the data.

2.5.1 Outline of data analysis

Evidence of these steps can be found in appendices F, G, H, I.

Step 1: Reading and Re-reading

IPA involves engaging closely and reflectively with each transcript before moving on to the next, following an iterative and inductive cycle (Smith 2007). Consequently, the first stage of the analysis involved immersing myself in the transcript, to stay as close to the participant account of their experience as possible. I wrote brief summaries of the transcript that included my initial thoughts and reactions (see Appendix F for an example of this). I listened to the audio recording of the interviews on my commute, and whilst walking, to re-engage with the data, and participant. I then read through the transcript whilst listening to the audio; hearing the participant's voice in my head as I engaged with the transcript data helped me to keep their voice in mind, staying as close as possible to their account.

Step 2: Exploratory Noting

At first, I noted anything of interest which allowed me to connect and identify the specific context of this participant, thinking about the ways they talk about their subjective experience of the climate crisis (Appendix G). I underlined anything that felt significant, and that I wanted to return to, or think about, for example, particular phrases or metaphors that stood out to me. Smith et al (2022) suggest focusing commentary on descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual observations, and after the initial read through, these formed the basis of my exploratory notes. Each case was individually analysed through all five steps, before moving onto the next; for the first two participants I used an iPad with the pencil function for noting, which meant I could write on the transcript, move my notes around, and assign different coloured highlighters to each type of exploratory note. As I got further into the analysis, I realised it was more helpful to be able to hold

the whole transcripts, for easy overviewing of all the data, and I switched to paper and pen, working with coloured pens for the various types of exploratory note.

Step 3: Constructing Experiential Statements

At this stage, I had a large amount of data, not only the transcript but the additional layer of exploratory notes. From here, Smith et al (2022) recommend developing experiential statements, the aim of which is to articulate the most important features of the participant experience, while reducing the amount of data. I aimed to closely capture the meaning for the participant, focusing more on my exploratory noting, thus allowing for the double hermeneutic - the researcher making sense of the participant making sense of the phenomenon (Smith et al, 2022). These statements attempt to reflect both my interpretation, and the participant's language, rather than simply a reconfiguration of the data (Smith & Nizza, 2022).

Step 4: Searching for connections across experiential statements

In practice, I did this slightly differently depending on whether I had used an iPad for analysis or pen and paper. For the iPad, I transferred all experiential statements to a new document and then zoomed out, to see the extensive list of statements. I moved them around attempting to cluster together statements that seemed to complement one another or had possible interconnections. Meanwhile for the pen and paper experiential statements, I physically cut them out, allowing me to move them freely around on the floor, arranging them with the same intention, to cluster them if they seemed interconnected (Appendix H). I continued this process of arranging and grouping together until I had clusters of groups that were connected, and I was then able to give these clusters titles that described their characteristics, turning them into personal experiential themes (Smith et al, 2022).

Step 5: Naming Personal Experiential Themes

The next stage of analysis involves developing Personal Experiential Themes (PETs) from the individual participant's clusters of experiential statements (Appendix I). PETs are so called to define the type of entity that they aim to describe; 'Personal' reflects that they are supposed to be at the level of the individual, to the particular person whose case is being analysed. 'Experiential' pertains to them being directly related to the participant's experience or experience of sense making. 'Themes' suggest the switch from being specific and local instances within the transcript, to analytic entities presented within the transcript as a whole (Smith et al, 2022). In this step, each cluster is given a title that describes the characteristics within each of the clusters and represents a move from the literal level to the analytic. As part of the organisation process of developing clusters and arranging them together, some smaller clusters that are made up of highly related experiential statements were grouped together and labelled as sub-themes under their relevant PETs. These PETs, along with subthemes, were put into a table for the individual case.

Step 6: Continuing individual analysis of other cases

This whole process is repeated with each participant transcript.

Step 7: Developing Group Experiential Themes

Once each participant had a PET table, patterns across the participant PET tables were observed, and the shared features generated Group Experiential Themes (GETs). These aimed to highlight all participants unique and shared experiences of the phenomenon that is being explored, searching for convergence and divergence across cases (Smith et al, 2022).

Step 8: Writing up and continuing the analysis

In IPA, the write up is a creative continuation of the iterative process of analysis, moving back and forth between the analysis to the data. Having completed the group analysis, I moved deeper into

the interpretation, engaging with the hermeneutic circle and moving away from the 'whole' (GETs) back into the 'part' (quotes), and reading them again, in the light of developing analysis. This micro-analysis of the parts can then be connected back to the whole, strengthening confidence in the GETs, and engaging the interpretation of data to a deeper level (Smith, et al., 2022).

2.6 Assessing quality and validity

Despite qualitative approaches being so prevalent within the field of psychological research, it is acknowledged that assessing its validity has had limitations (Meyrick, 2006). This is largely due to this type of research involving a variety of methodologies that are underpinned by a range of epistemologies (Smith et al, 2009). Yardley (2000) produced criteria that ensures, regardless of epistemology or methodology, research validity can be kept in mind throughout the process. These four principles are intended to be flexible, with the ethos of qualitative data in mind, and I have expanded on these below.

2.6.1. Sensitivity to context

This involves sensitivity to context such as the historical, ideological, socioeconomic, and normative influences on the participant and researcher's beliefs and experiences (Yardley, 2000). This can be demonstrated throughout the research process, for example, my choice of IPA methodology exhibits a sensitivity to my theoretical position, while my literature review shows sensitivity to social and historical contexts.

2.6.2. Commitment and rigour

This research shows a commitment to detail, clearly outlining the design and implementation of each stage, and offering a rationale for the choices made. To strengthen the rigour of this study, I consciously engaged with reflexivity throughout, as well as ensuring that I remained as close as

possible to the data, committing to ensuring that the analysis was grounded in the participant experience.

2.6.3. Transparency and coherence

This is shown through my reflective approach, and sharing clearly the research process, acknowledging how and why each step was transpired. I have attempted to be clear in describing my research process and offer a rationale for the decisions that were made.

2.6.4. Impact and importance

This is concerned with how important this research is, and particularly how interesting the reader might find it (Smith et al., 2009). This research aims to contribute meaningfully to our understanding of how talking therapists experience the climate crisis, adding valuable insight into the role of psychology and its evolution in the face of this crisis.

While these principles remain helpful for qualitative researchers, Nizza et al. (2021) have defined new guidelines for the assessment of qualitative research, more specifically, defining four clear quality indicators to achieve excellence in IPA research. These are expanded upon in more detail in the discussion chapter.

2.7 Personal Reflexivity

There have been several moments of impasse throughout this study, and reflexivity has been essential to explore them and consider ways to navigate through them. As discussed, there was a slow process of recruitment, and I found this incredibly difficult. At points I found myself feeling anxious that I wasn't doing enough active recruitment or that my participant facing information wasn't clear enough. I reflected on the recruitment process and acknowledged that I couldn't do more in terms of process, I had been actively emailing organisations to ask them to share my

recruitment information, and continuously posting to various groups, and I had also asked for feedback on participant facing information from those who I had emailed.

Being able to reflect on this was helpful and led to my questioning why I might be struggling with recruitment; at first, I reconsidered why I had focused on Counselling Psychologist experiences specifically. Upon reflection, I struggled to justify it, particularly considering I had not recruited anyone in five months. I discussed broadening the inclusion criteria with my supervisor, and we agreed that this would be the best course of action while maintaining homogeneity and the essence of the original research question.

Recruitment continued to be slow throughout, and I reflected on why this might have been. There is no way of knowing, but perhaps a general lack of awareness and engagement of climate issues means that when it is hinted at in sessions, talking therapists do not pull at that thread, or equally are unsure how to engage with the nature of the work. Therefore, perhaps there is discomfort engaging in research on this topic. Or perhaps talking therapists do not recognise having worked with climate distress, and formulate for generalised anxiety, and thus assume they do not meet the inclusion criteria. Conversely, perhaps there is an over engagement for some talking therapists, those who are more active in climate activism, and a sense of fatigue at partaking in research on the topic. It might also be that some clients do not see therapy as a space to explore indirect impacts of these more existential considerations, and therefore it does not feature as extensively within clinical practice.

I felt a sense of pressure once I began analysis; I was working full-time and there had already been significant delays to my research due to the recruitment process. I was also conscious of feeling the emergency of the climate crisis; in July 2021 and June 2022, as I was engaging with this study, there were heatwaves in the U.K., not to mention extensive flooding occurring in

Europe. Experiencing such climate events made me feel as though I needed to do something to engage people in this conversation. I hoped that I would be able to share my research as quickly as possible to facilitate these conversations as climate events within the U.K. were becoming more frequent.

Due to working full-time, I predominantly worked on my analysis over the weekends, and it became an arduous process, both due to this and the pressure I was experiencing. As I progressed with my first case, I became aware that I wasn't engaging with the data as I had intended to. My exploratory notes weren't what I would want them to be, they lacked depth, and I wondered if this was because I was trying to rush. I wasn't going as deeply into the particular experience of my first participant as I knew I should be, and as a result the noting consisted more of process related notes, focusing more on actions than experience. Being able to reflect on this, both through writing in my diary and discussion with my supervisor, I was able to explore why.

Initially we considered the methodology and discussed my changing to RTA. Once I began to consider this and research RTA, I realised how separated I had become from IPA; due to the extensive recruitment delays and starting a full-time job, I had not reengaged with the methodology in depth or immersed myself in any IPA research. I also realised how much my job was impacting on my engagement with the transcript; I was working predominantly in CBT in my role within the NHS health psychology service, where there was a focus on *doing* to support the client, rather than *being* with the client. Thus, I not only had to switch hats to researcher mode at the weekend, but I also had to switch to engage with the more experiential mindset. I'm not sure I would have recognised this without IPA embracing reflexivity and feeling comfortable openly exploring this with my supervisor. Once I recognised this, I began a process of immersing myself in IPA, reading both IPA literature and examining other IPA research studies. This supported me

to be more conscious for the duration of the analysis of when I was in the more active, *doing* phase so that I could come back to focus on my participants' experiences.

Within IPA the openness of research questions might mean that once the researcher has begun to engage with the data and inductive analysis of participant accounts, the study deviates from the original question (Smith, et al., 2022). Consequently, as my interviews progressed and then my analysis began, I became aware of the more personal nature of the interview data, and I recognised the need to retrospectively rework the research question. It changed from 'how do U.K talking therapists experience the climate crisis within clinical practice', to 'how do U.K. talking therapists experience the climate crisis both personally and professionally'. Given my stance as a critical realist, acknowledging the influence of our worlds on our experience of phenomenon, it makes sense that talking therapists' experiences within clinical practice would be mediated by their personal experiences.

Indeed, as I immersed myself and began constructing participant PETs and GETs, I reflected on just how much of what participants shared was focused on their more personal experience of the climate crisis, which captured participants' personal engagement with the topic. I realised that asking participants to bring an object will have affected the way they approached the interview, focusing more on their personal lived experiences rather than their experiences of clinical work. As a result, their objects were invariably personal, and in the interviews, they shared the personal meaning that they represented. I did not conduct a pilot interview, which, in retrospect, might have highlighted the personal nature of using object elicitation. Had such a pilot interview taken place the implications of eliciting these more personal reflections might have become apparent earlier, enabling more informed adjustments to the interview process at an earlier stage to ensure it remained in line with the original research question.

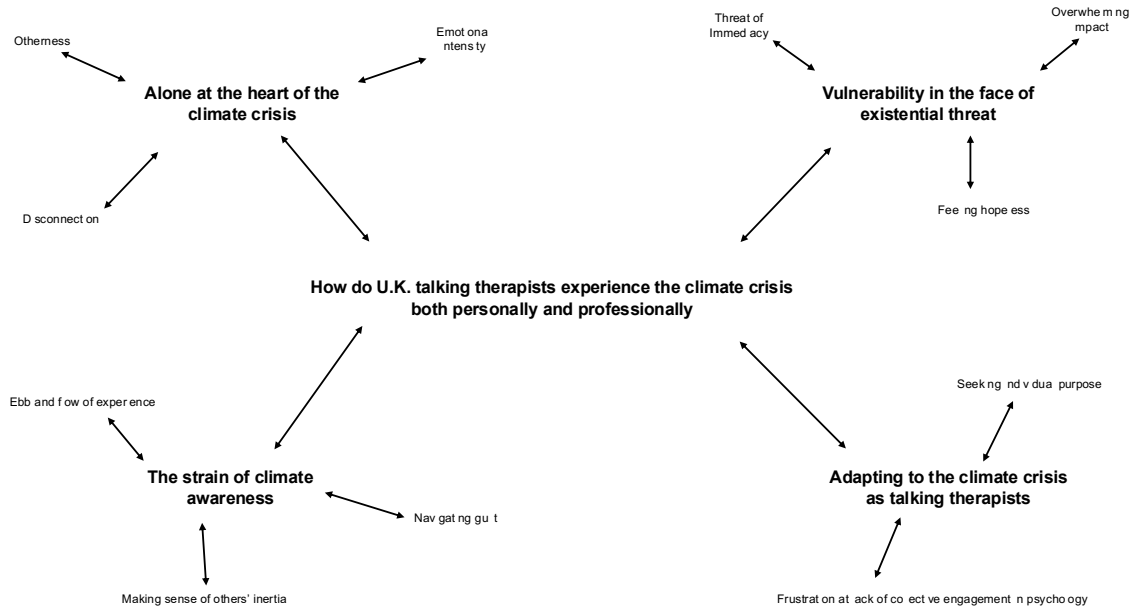
Chapter Three: Findings

3.1 Overview

This study has adopted an IPA methodology and aims to answer the question, how do U.K. talking therapists experience the climate crisis both personally and professionally. I will focus on the themes that are most pertinent across the whole group to help answer the research question, and this means that not all aspects of the participants' accounts can be shared. While each group experiential theme (GET) encapsulates particular experiences of what it is like to be a talking therapist during the climate crisis, the GETs and their subthemes are all intricately connected to one another, and not to be understood as disparate experiences, but instead represent an account of the patterns of experience of participants' as they, and then I, attempt to make sense of their experience of the climate crisis. Their interconnected nature is represented by the thematic map in Figure. 1.

Figure. 3-1.

Map of Group Experiential Themes and Subthemes



The first GET, **'alone at the heart of the climate crisis'**, describes the fundamentally isolating experience of climate crisis awareness. This theme captures participants' emotional experiences of the climate crisis as intense and deeply personal. It further depicts changing close relationships and the experience of disconnection that can happen because of contrasting climate consciousness with loved ones, as well as participants' experiences of otherness, that is, feeling that their climate awareness makes them different to the mainstream.

The second GET, **'vulnerability in the face of existential threat'**, explores the participants' experience of feeling under threat from the existential nature of the climate crisis, recognising their experiences of the immediacy of the threat, and feeling hopeless to control or influence its prevention. It also considers experiences of how overwhelming and powerfully destructive the impact of climate crisis is on the natural world, suggestive of their experience of humans' interconnectedness with nature.

The third GET, **'the strain of climate awareness'**, considers the pressure and stress that comes with climate awareness, recognising the ebb and flow of engagement and needing to move away from the climate crisis to cope. It also recognises experiences of guilt at the perception of not doing enough and captures the experiences of trying to understand others' lack of engagement.

The fourth GET, '**adapting to the climate crisis as talking therapists'**, describes participants' experience of changing professional identities as they adapt to the crisis. This theme captures their individual experience of seeking purpose through their professional roles, as well as recognising the collective responsibility to engage in this issue, and their frustration at the profession's lack of collective engagement with the climate crisis so far.

I will present my findings and offer insight into the analytic process below. My commentary, supported by participant extracts, aims to stay as close to the participant experience as possible, and illustrates my engagement with the double hermeneutic, that is how I have made sense of the participants' experiences. This symbol, […] signifies that I have left out a section of quotation, typically when that part of the participant extract deviates from the particular experiential area of interest. I have taken care to maintain a phenomenological attitude to ensure that the removal of any section of quotation is not influenced by my interests or my own experiences and prior understandings of the topic that could result in a misrepresentation of the participant experience (Eatough & Smith, 2017). To aid the reader in getting a sense of the participants and their objects, I have included text description in Table.3. and an indicative visual representation for each participant's object in appendix J. All identifying details have been removed or altered to preserve confidentiality, and I have assigned each participant a pseudonym. These pseudonyms are nature-based names, chosen to reflect the value I place on nature, which contributes to my motivation for this study, and signifies my impact on the research.

Table. 3-1.

Table of Text Description of Participant Profession and Objects

All names and identifying information have been altered to preserve confidentiality

Name	Profession	Object
Jasmine	Clinical Psychologist	2 photographs: 1 a blooming Indian bean tree and 1 a fallen horse chestnut tree
Lily	Counselling Psychologist	A dandelion thistle within a glass orb, paperweight

Name	Profession	Object
Hazel	Integrative Counsellor	A mobile phone
Fern	Counselling Psychologist	A small stone that sits in the palm of the hand, collected from beach
Heath	Educational Psychologist	A copy of Resurgence and Ecologist magazine
Rose	Educational Psychologist	Photograph of six dead giraffes captured in aerial view

3.2 GET 1: Alone at the heart of the climate crisis

This GET attempts to explore participants' experience of isolation and feeling alone at the heart of their awareness and engagement in climate issues. I seek to capture this experience across three subthemes; the first focuses on the isolating depths of the emotional intensity that the climate crisis brings up for participants. The second considers the experience of disconnection from loved ones who are at different points of their climate crisis experience. The final theme explores the experience of otherness, of feeling different to the mainstream experience of the climate crisis.

3.2.1 Emotional intensity: 'Being in the fire'

All participants describe the climate crisis as an emotive topic, in which '*a whole range of emotions…frequently come up*' (Heath, 336). They recognise that these emotions are uncomfortable, '*I find the discomfort of it very, very hard'* (Rose, 365). This subtheme explores

the intensity of these emotional experiences and attempts to capture most participants experience of the isolation that comes from fully experiencing them. For example, Jasmine describes her emotional response to growing climate crisis awareness:

> *And I think as I became, as that awareness grew, my emotional response became quite intense. I would have quite intense experiences of fear, but even more than that, for me it was grief (Jasmine, 105)*

This first sentence seems like an in-the-moment reflection as Jasmine considers her growing climate awareness, '*And I think, as I became, as that awareness grew'*. Jasmine explains her '*emotional response became quite intense'*, and then immediately repeats '*intense'*, I have interpreted this as emphasising how strong the emotional experience has been for Jasmine. In particular, she shares that she has felt fear and grief, which in their nature are agonising, deeply personal emotions to experience, and I have understood them to highlight the sense of Jasmine's profound emotional experience. Indeed, I have interpreted her use of '*for me'* to indicate her awareness that the overwhelming grief might not be felt by everyone and perhaps this emphasises the unique nature of her emotional experience. She later adds:

> *Seeing the emotions, even the really, really, painful ones as a really core part of my humanity… and that kind of being in the fire with them so to speak is, I don't know, maybe a way in which I can see myself as someone who cares and is compassionate (Jasmine, 158)*

This extract further suggests the personal nature of this experience for Jasmine. The repetition of '*really'* suggests the undeniable discomfort she experiences at the hands of her emotions, and

this experience is developed as she describes, '*being in the fire'*. Fire is an element that consumes and can destroy, and so I have interpreted being in the fire with her emotions as suggestive of how consuming and primal this experience has been for her; although there is a sense that fire can be experienced by others simultaneously, by its nature it is destructive and isolates the sufferer, suggesting that Jasmine must sit alone with those devastating emotions. For Jasmine, there is a sense that her emotional experience represents her understanding of who she fundamentally is; recognising the intensity as due to '*a really core part of my humanity'*, that she '*cares and is compassionate'*, further emphasising the intense, isolating, unique nature of this experience.

Lily shares her own experience of this:

> *I also found it very, very umm difficult… very isolating to have these profound feelings of grief and anger and shame around the climate crisis. And there was really not anyone in my sphere to talk to about it*... (Lily 98)

For Lily, the emotional experience is '*profound'*, suggesting that, like Jasmine, the emotions have at some point consumed Lily. There is a pause after describing the emotional experience as '*very, very umm difficult',* and perhaps this pause suggests a moment of reflection for Lily, before she continues to identify that perhaps what has been difficult is how *'very isolating'* the emotional experience has felt for her. Indeed, sharing and exploring intense emotional experiences is at the heart of emotional processing, particularly for talking therapists, and perhaps the lack of '*anyone in her sphere'* to talk to about this indicates her struggle at having to go through this experience alone. This experience is further explored by Lily later when she describes clients bringing climate distress into the therapy room:

> *I think if I hadn't already been doing this work then suddenly, I'm in this unfamiliar territory, and unfamiliar with my own grief and anxieties and fears and aloneness, then it may very quickly just overwhelm me. But I've already shone the light in a lot of corners there* (Lily 497)

Lily explains the value of '*doing this work'*, that is, developing self-awareness of '*my own grief and anxieties and fears and aloneness'.* This emphasises the unique position of talking therapists who are both experiencing the existential threat of the climate crisis, and concurrently supporting others as they do the same. Lily recognises the necessity of processing personal feelings, at the risk of '*overwhelm'* if they are brought up in session without prior exploration of their existence. '*Shone the light*' is a metaphor that suggests paying attention to something. I have interpreted Lily's use of it here, to suggest that Lily has had to go to the dark '*corners'* of her emotional experience and pay attention to what the climate crisis brings up for her. Facing these difficult emotions that exist in these dark corners is personal work, that needs to be done before Lily feels she can support others with this process.

Similarly, Fern acknowledges that the emotional experience is rooted a little deeper and needs further exploration:

> "*I think that's been the challenging part of it, thinking, don't go down that road again, of thinking I've dealt with it because I've said it and I've looked at it. Actually, sometimes it's a bit more than that, it's about actually thinking well, what would this mean for me? Where's the sort of core fear? (*Fern, 593)

Here, Fern is talking about emotional processing of the climate crisis and indicates that there is a '*road'* she usually takes, where her experience is on a more superficial level, '*thinking I've dealt with it because I've said it and I've looked at it'*. Earlier, she had shared her experience of death anxiety as a teenager, and the ease at which she was able to switch off to soothe her discomfort, '*I think it's really easy to turn that off*' (493). When it comes to the climate crisis, Fern acknowledges she doesn't want to '*go down that road'* but recognises the '*challenge'* of digging into her emotional experience; '*it's a bit more than that'* suggests her experience of active contemplation of the emotions, using introspection to explore them and better understand her unique experiencing of them. She later adds:

> *It's been a process sort of actually looking at those more uncomfortable things underneath the anxiety, underneath the 'I'm worried about it'* (Fern, 628)

Fern's use of '*actually'* hints at the road she travelled before and her prior experience of dismissing or avoiding the uncomfortable feelings this brings up, emphasising this shift and her desire to pay attention to the truth of her unique emotional experience, digging deeper into exploration. I have interpreted the repetition of '*underneath'* as Fern emphasising this need for depth awareness; although Fern has expressed anxiety, her experience of the climate crisis has brought up issues that are personal for Fern and the way that she experiences her world. Here Fern is recognising her need to explore '*those more uncomfortable things'*, and what the impact of the crisis might mean for her, highlighting the personal and individual nature of this emotional experience to her.

3.2.2 Disconnection: 'she sees me as extreme'

This theme focuses on exploring participants experience of disconnection within relationships. Another factor that contributes to the experience of aloneness at the heart of the climate crisis is the sense of changing relationships recognised by some participants; while some expressed relief

that loved ones were joining them in their climate awareness, others shared a sense of growing disconnection on this topic with certain family members.

Hazel and Lily both describe similar experiences:

> *By getting more into this, it feels like I've become fur- getting further away from people that I know, people that are part of my life. Thankfully not my husband, he's on the same page, thank God (Hazel, 376)*

> *Thankfully in the meantime, my husband is alongside me in this, so I've kind of pulled him along and woke him up and he's now not far off, so that really helps to have that kind of support as well, that close support* (Lily, 310)

For both Hazel and Lily, the relief they experience at being able to share this experience with their husbands is clear. Both say '*thankfully'*, which indicates their appreciation of having their husbands to share the experience, and I have understood this as not something they take for granted as perhaps this suggests it has not always been the case. For Hazel this is followed closely by '*thank God'* which emphasises her sense of relief that her husband is '*on the same page'* as her. Her use of the idiom, '*on the same page*', I have understood to mean he agrees with her, and they are both as invested in climate issues as each other. She also describes moving further away from '*people that are part of my life'*, suggestive of transforming relationships and disconnection, as she becomes more engaged with climate awareness. Meanwhile, for Lily there is a sense that her and her husband have not always connected on this issue, and she has had to actively engage with him to encourage him; '*pulled him along and woke him up',* indicates perhaps a sense of difficulty in doing this, and rousing him from a lack of awareness of climate issues, and '*he's now not far off'*suggests that this is ongoing and perhaps he is not quite in the

same place as her. Yet her use of '*alongside'* suggests that now she feels they are close enough to each other, experiencing this together, and supporting one another. '*That really helps'* denotes the value Lily places on having this '*close support'* for her climate awareness, possibly due to not experiencing close support within other relationships. For both Lily and Hazel, the support of their husbands is valuable to them, and perhaps their relief and appreciation of this suggests that this experience is not always the case, indeed, they both also share a similar sense of disconnect, for example Hazel shares:

> *I had a conversation with one of my sisters. It didn't go very well, […] but what came out of that was the realisation that she sees me as extreme. And so that was really… that realization that somehow, I've become, for some people, sort of extreme in the way that I live or think. So, there's that real sense of separation... that's… difficult (*Hazel 656)

Hazel describes the realisation that her sister sees her as extreme. As she acknowledges this shift in relationship, her tone is one of sadness perhaps suggestive of the sense of disconnect that has occurred with her sister, and I've interpreted '*somehow I've become… '* as her not understanding why others might think of her as extreme, and perhaps suggests an experience of feeling misunderstood. Hazel struggles to finish the sentence, '*that was really…*' which I have understood to denote how impactful this realisation has been for her, unable to put it in words. The rhythm of her speech slows as she draws this sentence to an end, '*separation… that's… difficult'*. This, along with the pauses, indicate how difficult this experience might be for her to reflect on, and perhaps highlights how troubling this sense of being misunderstood has felt for Hazel, evolving into feeling disconnected from her sister. This is echoed by Lily:

*I have a number of sisters, but one of them just could not understand why I was kind of grief-stricken you know, and I just couldn't really verbalise that… I kind of felt embarrassed to say that 'you have no idea, but the world is never going to be the same' (*Lily, 78)

As Lily became more concerned by COVID-19, she explains that this had a broader influence on her experience in the world, recognising the existential threat stemming from more macro systemic issues. As a result, she found herself '*grief-stricken'*, which I have understood as feeling overcome with sorrow, and perhaps a sense of resignation that the world as she knew it was changing so fundamentally. She explains that her sister could not understand why she was overcome with grief, and perhaps this echoes Hazel's experience of feeling misunderstood; Lily struggles to explain herself, '*I just couldn't really verbalise that…'* which I have interpreted to emphasise the internal struggle as she tries to make sense of her experience that '*the world is never going to be the same'*. This recognition is an extreme shift in her reality, '*never'*suggests an absolute, and perhaps where her embarrassment at sharing this stems from, the source of her sorrow, is indicative of her self-awareness of this and the discomfort of categorically stating this certainty to her sister. Indeed, I have interpreted the pause before sharing this as a moment to gather herself before expressing the significance of this experience to me. Lily's last sentence reiterates the sense of aloneness she experiences in relation to the climate crisis, '*you have no idea'* emphasises this feeling of disconnect; Lily's understanding of the implications for the future is something that her sister simply cannot comprehend.

For Heath, perhaps the sense of disconnection started when he was younger; here he shares the experience of his family being less than supportive of his enthusiasm towards recycling growing up:

I was like the house champion […] with actually quite a lot of active resistance, you know, 'oh, oh, it's bullshit. It takes too much time', 'ugh I'm not sitting washing a pot', you know, a plastic pot. umm so I *would do that.* I *would, you know, make sure it was sorted out (Heath, 218)*

And later thinking about his father:

I think if you asked him, 'how much do you care about the environment?' He'd just be like, 'ugh it's a load of bullshit' (Heath, 256)

These extracts suggest that Heath has faced disconnection with his family when it comes to engaging in climate activity; not only did they not join him in his recycling endeavours as a child, but they seem to be vigorously against it, '*active resistance'*, '*ugh', 'it's bullshit'*. I have understood this to be an experience of disconnect with his family, particularly his father. For Heath, recycling was important, he was the '*house champion'* and conscientious of environmental concerns, so perhaps his family's rejection and in some cases derision of recycling efforts, '*it's bullshit', 'ugh',* resulted in Heath feeling isolated in his efforts. Heath's repetition of '*I would'* and emphasis on the 'I', suggests his taking responsibility *despite* his family not doing the same and further emphasises the disconnection between them on this topic. Indeed, later when he considers his father's feelings on the environment he repeats '*it's bullshit'*, which is not simply a refusal to engage in climate issues, but I have interpreted it to be his experience of his father calling these issues nonsense, perhaps even misleading, which is so different to Heath's experience of the crisis, rooted in science '*I've always been into geography […] thinking about atmospheric conditions and influences on climate'* (263), further indicating an experience of disconnect between them on this issue.

3.2.3 Otherness: ‘A brave subject’

In addition to emotional intensity and disconnection being part of the experience of aloneness, another factor contributing to this GET is that of recognising a sense of difference from mainstream society in relation to their experience of the climate crisis. When considered alongside society’s ‘*difficulty to look at it’* (Lily, 9), most participants shared insight into this sense of otherness; their awareness, concerns, and engagement with climate issues divides them from those who perhaps deny, avoid, or ignore. For example, Hazel explains that consuming meat and dairy products had always been a normal part of her life, but here she shares the impact of learning more about farming industries effect on the climate:

> *When I started to think about it and just thought, just realised, it's like seeing the world through a completely different lens* (Hazel, 321)

This suggests a fundamental shift has occurred for Hazel, one that separates her from how she used to see the world. ‘*When I started to think about it’*, indicates a developing awareness and processing of information she had not considered before. I have understood her repetition of ‘*just’* to suggest the immediate and perhaps obvious realisation she felt at the assimilation of information about the negative impact of farming industries on the climate. This new information caused Hazel to experience a significant change in perspective, a new awareness, emphasised by her use of this metaphor: ‘*seeing the world through a completely different lens’*. This suggests a sense of difference from her previous perspective as her awareness has grown, and her understanding of the inherent processes that she previously considered normal, have changed. She later adds:

> *I think there's a sort of feeling 'why isn't everyone else feeling this way?' I feel like I'm living in this weird parallel universe and… it's not a very comfortable place to be honest* (Hazel, 681)

Having developed more awareness of the climate crisis and implications, Hazel explains that she struggles to understand how society does not reflect this awareness. Perhaps Hazel feels frustrated and alone in her understanding, suggested by her asking '*why isn't everyone feeling this way'.* This is further indicated through her metaphor comparing her experience to '*living in this weird parallel universe'*, which I have interpreted to mean that she feels separate from others, existing in a universe in which her reality is different from others. Her tone slows as she contemplates being in this different place, and she pauses, perhaps recognising the experience of otherness and her discomfort of this, *'… it's not a very comfortable place to be honest'*.

This experience of being different is echoed in Jasmine's account:

> *And I do sometimes just look around and I'm like, why isn't everyone doing something on this? I find that… very frustrating that sense of, are people not awake to this? (Jasmine, 507)*

Jasmine describes her experience of others not being engaged in action around the climate crisis and explains the frustration she feels at this. Like Hazel, Jasmine uses a metaphor to describe her experience, *'are people not awake to this'*, which I have interpreted as Jasmine understanding her experience of others inaction by distinguishing between being awake and not awake. To be awake is to be aware and responding to surroundings, and as such, I have understood Jasmine's particular use of '*not awake'*, rather than asleep, as suggestive of her astonishment that people remain unaware to this issue, a distinct difference from her

experience. Indeed, Jasmine's tone as she says this, is one of incredulity that people are not recognising the issue that seems so obvious to Jasmine; I have understood her sense of the distinction she feels in relation to her own awareness versus others, and that feeling of difference between her and them.

Similarly, when I asked Fern why she was participating in the research, she explained:

> *It's almost kind of a brave subject, because it has particular emotional reactions from people* (Fern, 11)

Like Hazel and Jasmine, there's the sense that Fern is mindful of others in relation to her own experience and engagement of the climate crisis. '*It's almost, kind of*' is hesitant which might denote a general wariness in addressing the issue of climate change as we begin our interview. Indeed, Fern's description of it as a '*brave subject*' might suggest that it is not an easy topic for Fern to discuss with others. Although Fern does not specify what kind of reactions she has encountered here, '*particular emotional reactions from people',* her description of the subject as brave might suggest she has experience of this topic evoking disagreements. Later she expands on this experience and describes what it was like during training when the climate crisis came up:

> *This was my first time of having these conversations without it turning into a political debate, where it's just been, how's that landing with you? How are you feeling about it? What's that bringing up? Rather than, what's your opinion on this? And what do we think people should be doing? And what side are you on?"* (Fern, 809).

This extract gives deeper meaning as to Fern's experience of this subject as a brave one, and perhaps suggests previous conversations have evoked judgement from others about what '*people*

should be doing', or '*what side are you on*'. Typically, political debates consider two opposing views, and they are usually contentious, Fern explains that her previous experience of conversation about the climate crisis are that they turn into a '*political debate'*; I have interpreted this as her experience of the climate crisis provoking a feeling of opposition and difference between those who recognise the seriousness of the issue, and those who do not. Indeed, Fern's description that she has been questioned about what side she is on, perhaps indicates her sense that regardless of which side you are on, you are perceived as different by the other side.

There is a slight divergence of Heath's experience of this; I have understood a desire to distance himself from the idea of 'hippie' which could suggest that he also experiences a sense of otherness. When discussing that he came across his object, a magazine, while on holiday, he shares:

> *It was kind of a bit of an arty, hippie air b 'n b vibe, and I did kind of think like, I'm not sure any of these things I'm reading will be for me (Heath, 30)*

And later:

> *[the magazine is] all about resurgence in terms of life and nature and umm… it isn't hippie-y [laughs] you know, which might be an off-putting thing for me, but it's, it's very critical* (Heath, 51)

Heath's experience of the climate crisis stems from his interest in science and learning, '*there's always been an academic interest in that sort of thing'* (274), while a hippie is typically a person associated with a subculture that rejects more conventional values. Perhaps for some, maybe including Heath's perception of his father, the climate crisis is *'a load of bullshit'* (258), and it might

be considered a 'hippie' issue, something that is not an issue for the majority, creating for Heath, this sense of othering. I have interpreted Heath's rejection of the notion of hippie, '*I'm not sure these things will be for me'*, and '*might be an off-putting thing for me'* as an attempt to distance himself from any association with hippie culture, and an assertion that for him this subject is rooted in science. Indeed, what draws him to the magazine is '*it's very critical'*, which situates himself as a professional who thinks analytically within our interview. It might be that Heath has had experience of climate issues being dismissed as a meaningless hippie endeavour, and this is an attempt to close the gap on that experience of otherness and recognise himself as someone who engages with conversations about the climate using reason and logic, versus perhaps hippies who Heath might have understood would do it as part of their counterculture and for the sake of rejecting the norm.

3.3 GET 2: Vulnerability in the face of existential threat

Developing from participants' experience of aloneness, the second GET is closely connected to the first; it seeks to explore the participants' experience of vulnerability in relation to the existential threat that is posed by the climate crisis. I attempt to capture this across three subthemes; the first examines participants changing reality as they recognise the threat that comes from the immediacy of the crisis. The second explores the participants' experience of feeling hopeless that they, or anyone, can avert the climate crisis. The final subtheme attempts to capture their experience of the impact of the climate crisis as a backdrop, permeating into people's lives and experiences, recognising the threat to them stemming from human's interconnectedness with nature.

3.3.1 Threat of immediacy: 'it isn't the future, it's now'

Several participants describe the experience of witnessing the climate crisis coming into their worlds and a sense of threat at recognising its immediacy. For example, Rose shares her object,

an image of dead giraffes, and explains that this represents her becoming more emotionally connected to climate issues. She explains that this was a catalyst for her to recognise the impact of the catastrophic floods in Pakistan on the Pakistani students she works with:

> *And there was something about it, suddenly I was emotionally connected with it […] Actually, we're talking about real creatures, real people. It's not just something that might make our lives a little bit… we might have to change some things because the climate's changing… this is dangerous and frightening and is going to impact eventually on all of us (Rose, 88)*

'*Suddenly'* and '*actually'* denote a change for Rose, and I have interpreted this as indicative of a shift in experience and recognising her previous sense that the climate crisis existed further away from her world. Rose's repeated use of '*real'* suggests how the image has impacted her and her recognition that this issue is now a reality for her and her students. I have understood the pause after '*changing'* and Rose's use of present tense when describing '*this is dangerous and frightening*' to emphasise this experience of immediacy, and the fear of threat it brings to her world. The significance of this understanding for Rose is clear when she says, it *'is going to impact eventually on all of us'*, suggesting a sense of inevitability as she experiences the dread of the crisis moving ever closer.

Fern shares a similar experience using her object, a stone, and explains that it represents a recent trip to the beach with a young relative. On this trip they witnessed cliffs collapsing which Fern attributes to climate change, and she shares how this impacted her:

> *I think when you see things like that, it's sort of quite evocative of... there was something quite dramatic about that, actually seeing something* (Fern, 77)

I interpreted Fern's unfinished sentence of what this evokes for her as perhaps indicating the enormity of witnessing this herself; there is a sense of being overwhelmed by that moment and fear at what it means, even as she describes it to me and struggles to articulate her experience. Fern is aware of the climate crisis as a concept, but perhaps '*actually seeing something'* highlights its proximity to her and her world; I have understood her use of '*actually'* as indicating a sense of surprise at the closeness of this to her, and perhaps a shifting sense of reality. She later continues:

> *It was something that felt quite big […] then afterwards I walked away, thinking, did I, did I take that a bit, too…seriously […] was I sort of over-anxious about that, because of it sort of representing something, 'oh nature is sort of quite unstable'* (Fern, 120)

Fern explains that this collapse '*felt quite big'*, and then goes on to question her own experience of what happened. The vagueness of her description, '*quite big'*, and her subsequent questioning of it, I have understood as a reluctance to accept the closeness, and perhaps this indicates that she is struggling to fully admit the true meaning of this experience and how frightening it was. I interpreted her repetition of '*sort of*' as a continuation of this sense of hesitancy, and it might suggest that although Fern has witnessed the immediacy of a climate event, there is fear at fully embracing it and acknowledging the threat and what that might mean for Fern, and her world.

Meanwhile, for Jasmine, this recognition of the closeness of the climate crisis happened a few years ago. She explains that her object, photos of trees from her garden, emphasises her strong connection to nature, particularly trees, which is what has enabled her to recognise how near climate issues are to her world:

I think there is something about maybe when you see that thing that means a lot to you under threat or recognising it's changed or vanished that really makes the climate crisis very salient (Jasmine, 74)

Having witnessed the climate crisis impact on '*that thing that means a lot'* to her, Jasmine conveys a sense of how close this threat feels to her, '*very salient'*. She has noticed that trees have '*vanished'*, the thing that means a lot to her are disappearing, and I have understood this as her recognition of the immediacy of the climate crisis in her world. Indeed, I have interpreted her switch from past tense, '*changed or vanished'*, to present tense, '*makes',* to suggest that while this is something she has observed over time, the climate crisis remains very present for her now.

Later, Jasmine explains how her connection to trees facilitated her growing awareness and describes her experience of the anxiety that developed from seeing what was happening to them, "*I became very sort of hypervigilant to it, not purposefully, I just I think through the anxiety*" (110). From this, I have understood that for Jasmine, this experience of being on alert and concerned about what was happening to the trees is a natural response to her observing the immediacy of the climate crisis through witnessing her beloved trees '*under threat'*. This emphasises the implicit experience of threat at the immediacy of the crisis, as participants are exposed to its encroaching impact.

3.3.2 Feeling hopeless: 'sleepwalking into the tidal wave'

Continuing to explore the theme of vulnerability, another factor that contributes is participants' experience of feeling unable to defend themselves or act effectively to prevent the climate crisis. All participants shared an experience of feeling hopeless at times, a sense of resignation at recognising the magnitude of the climate crisis, rendering any meaningful change unlikely. Rose provides an account of the impact of her age on her experience of feeling hopeless:

I'm 70 years old this year, there's sort of that feeling that it's not going to get put right in my lifetime is one that I think is quite high on my list of gloomy, difficult, anxious feelings about it […] It's just that feeling that I might not see anything any different in the next ten years because it's such a huge thing, it'll take a lot longer than that to sort out some of the issues, if they ever get sorted. (Rose, 362)

Age puts things in perspective for Rose, and she shares the feeling that climate issues won't be resolved in her lifetime, '*I might not see anything any different in the next ten years'*. I understand this to reflect her sense of mortality in relation to feeling that nothing can be done; there is a sense of anxiety, perhaps intensified by identifying that there is a limit to how long she has left to experience any significant changes, and her feeling might be that this is an impossibility, given her '*gloomy, difficult, anxious feelings'* about it. There is a sense of the vastness of the issue, '*such a huge thing'*, and of Rose losing hope, feeling resigned to the issues being beyond manageable, *'it's not going to get put right in my lifetime',* and *'if they ever get sorted*'. I have interpreted her use of '*if*', as Rose's uncertainty and feelings of doubt, which emphasise her experience of hopelessness. This sense of resignation is further highlighted later when she explains how unusual it is for her to feel this way:

I'm usually pretty good at setting myself back on track a little bit, coming up with something that I might do that's going to make me feel a bit better about it. Yet, I don't know what it is about the environment, I suppose it's because it's so huge, it's hard to work out what you would do. (Rose, 405)

She reiterates her earlier comment '*it's so huge'*, emphasising this sense of vastness, and in this context perhaps a sense of the struggle to get a handle of it, highlighting her feelings of

hopelessness. Perhaps this reflects a disheartening realisation that the enormity of the climate crisis defies her typical coping strategies. Indeed, her tone here is slightly dejected, and I have interpreted this as suggestive of her disappointment that she isn't able to do more, perhaps uncertain of what she even could do against something so '*huge'*. Rose explains she usually empowers herself to act when she feels this way, and that makes her feel better, but in this case, she is struggling. Her use of the phrase '*back on track',* suggests that she feels she is off track, and perhaps highlights her inner conflict between wanting to do more and a resignation that there are limits to what she can do. Her transition from *I'* to '*you'* in the final sentence might suggest a distancing of herself from this uncomfortable feeling of being off track and feeling hopeless.

Lily's account further encapsulates this theme of hopelessness. She reflects on her object, a dandelion thistle orb, and explains that in part, it represents what feels like an inevitable loss:

> *Oh my God, maybe this is all we'll have left is something...a little relic that we can look at as a remnant of what no longer exists. Umm, so I actually find it umm, like right now even talking about it, it fills me with grief actually, and a sense that umm you know, a kind of desperation around the fragility and wanting to protect and preserve and at the same time realising that it might go, it might all go... (Lily, 44)*

I can feel the panic in Lily's tone: '*oh my God'* expressing both distress and desperation, perhaps suggestive of Lily's anguish that not enough is being done to stop the climate crisis from developing further. Lily's in-the-moment reflection that she is *filled* with grief and consumed with desperation just thinking about what might happen, suggests that she is aware that despite efforts, climate issues might not be resolved, and there would be significant losses. The repetition of '*it might go, it might all go'* denotes Lily's resignation to this as a possibility and emphasises how hopeless she feels that this will happen.

Later Lily expands on this experience and shares her frustration at people with power not doing more: "*I just think, we're just sleepwalking into the tidal wave"* (Lily, 375). This is a powerful metaphor for the feelings of hopelessness that seems to consume Lily at times. Her repetition of '*just'* indicates that for her this concept is a simple one, her experience that more is not being done to counteract the emergency. I have understood Lily's experience of hopelessness here through her use of '*tidal wave'* to represent the power of the crisis, a wave that comes crashing down, causing devastation and destruction and that cannot be stopped. This is experienced alongside her feeling that society is '*sleepwalking'*, suggesting that we are disengaged from the existential threat, asleep but walking mindlessly closer to the source of destruction.

Fern's reflections add another dimension to this feeling of hopelessness. She articulates a deep distrust of those in power:

> *I realised that some of the reasons that I felt defended in the past against talking about it is because there's… a fear about the fact that I don't think the people in charge are necessarily helping, and that not trusting and thinking, 'are they just going to use this as a power grab?' (Fern, 479)*

This suggests that Fern feels dependent on the '*people in charge'* who I have understood to be the government. Her suggestion that this issue could be used as a '*power grab'* I have interpreted as her perception that this issue is not being treated seriously enough and is simply used as a political attempt to obtain control and get votes. She says she does not think they are helping the climate situation, and I have understood her saying '*not trusting'*, as her not having hope that they will make any real policy changes to support the climate crisis. Fern shares that she has felt '*defended in the past'* due to these concerns, and I have understood this to mean that she has

felt guarded and reluctant to feel hope that the government are looking after society's interests. I have understood this to emphasise a broader sense of resignation, if the people in charge cannot be trusted to engage seriously with the climate crisis, then the hope for meaningful interventions diminish, leaving individuals to grapple with the crisis in isolation, ultimately feeling alone and hopeless against something so vast.

3.3.3 Overwhelming impact of the climate crisis: 'it's too big'

Not only did participants feel vulnerable due to the threatening immediacy of the climate crisis and feelings of helplessness, but some participants also describe a sense of vulnerability through their experience of feeling overwhelmed by the impact of the climate crisis. For example, Jasmine shares how inconceivable it feels when she hears about the devastation of the crisis; she describes hearing about the Australian wildfires, and the loss of wildlife reported as being in the billions:

> *Billions of animals were killed and just those, those types of things being maybe just too big to comprehend and, in those cases, could become… would become… really overwhelming. Like, how can we stop it? It's too big…* (Jasmine, 135)

For Jasmine, the loss of billions of wildlife at the hands of the crisis is incomprehensible; the repetition that the crisis is '*too big'*, indicates a struggle to verbalise how destructive and overwhelming the impact of the climate crisis feels for Jasmine. As she expresses the conditional mood, '*could become… would become',* she pauses, and I have interpreted this pause as a sense of overwhelm in the moment, thinking about the reality of billions of deaths and the significance of this loss and what it means to her. After the pause, she amends could to would, indicating her assertion that the consequence of this destruction *would* result in certain overwhelm, perhaps in

part due to how hard it feels to recognise how destructive the climate crisis is, and what the implications of this will be for her.

Hazel echoes Jasmine's experience of the overwhelming impact of the climate crisis when she shares a recent conversation she had:

> *And also, I mean, she said something like this is, it's, oh, I'm so glad you found your path. And I said to her, it's not really, it's… I don't feel like I have a choice in my mind. This issue is so big, it percolates everything […] And then when someone says, 'oh, well you've chosen this', it doesn't feel like it was a choice. It's like, I can't see how we can ignore this because it's so big and there's no time. (Hazel, 669)*

This extract suggests that for Hazel, engaging in climate awareness is not a choice, it cannot be ignored because the impacts of it are too vast. Hazel's tone changes at the suggestion that this is a '*path'* she has chosen, there is a hint of frustration, and I have interpreted this as emphasising her rejection that engaging in climate action is an inclination. Hazel's speech quickens as she describes the issue as '*so big, it percolates everything'*, and this might highlight Hazel feeling a sense of pressure, perhaps to act before the impact is irreversible, emphasised as she later says, '*it's so big and there's no time'*. There is also a sense that for Hazel the impact of the crisis '*percolates'*, which I have understood as her experience of the climate crisis gradually filtering through to all parts of her world, and the unrelenting impact that will be deeply felt if it continues to pervade.

This experience is emphasised by Fern when she describes its more implicit nature existing as a backdrop in their lives; "*everything's the same day to day, but there's this big thing going on, that's sort of not going to go."* (Fern, 53). I have understood this to echo Hazel's experience of the

climate crisis being felt so gradually, that for Fern it is almost as if it does not exist, '*everything's the same day to day',* yet the influence it has is unstoppable '*not going to go'*. For Fern, perhaps the impacts are more indirect, yet both her and Hazel echo Jasmine when they describe it as '*big'*, which I have interpreted to highlight just how powerless they feel in the face of an infinite and overwhelming issue. As they become more aware of the overwhelming impacts that this '*big'* issue is having on the natural world, maybe there is a sense that they too are under threat and unable to stop the impact, and this is why the reality of that feels unfathomable, it cannot be verbalised in any other way than to describe it as so '*big'*.

Meanwhile, Lily echoes these experiences pertaining to powerlessness at the overwhelming impact of the climate crisis by recognising it more systemically, as part of the context within which we live. She explains that colleagues have questioned the need to bring the climate crisis into their trauma work, and shares her experience of the necessity of doing this:

> *Everything is situated, even that car accident that someone had is still happening within the environmental kind of situation that we find ourselves in, so nothing sits outside of it. This is the thing too… that it's* so *big, everything sits inside of this issue* (Lily, 575)

Like Jasmine, Hazel, and Fern, Lily describes the climate crisis as '*so big'*, suggesting that Lily also struggles to put into words her experience of how far-reaching the consequences are. Perhaps this indicates that for Lily too, there is a sense of how powerful the climate crisis is. Lily expands on this by explaining, '*everything sits inside this issue*', which I interpreted as Lily's experience of its vastness and existence as a macrosystemic influence on other experiences. This description suggests that for Lily, the broader systemic implications of the climate crisis have such an impact, that '*even that car accident'* should be viewed within this context. I have understood her use of '*even'* to indicate that she recognises it might sound like an improbable

connection at face value, but perhaps this emphasises just how pervasive and influential our relationship with the natural world is, that it might contribute to a seemingly separate event, a car accident.

3.4 GET 3: The strain of climate awareness

This GET seeks to consider participants experience of the strain associated with climate crisis awareness, which makes sense to me given the previously explored experiences of aloneness and vulnerability. I attempt to capture this experience across three subthemes; the first considers the ebb and flow of experience, that is the participants inherent need to move away from the crisis at times. The second looks at the experience of shame, and their attempts to navigate the self-criticism they feel about themselves in relation to what they think they should be doing. The third explores participants' experience of trying to understand others' avoidance of climate issues and their empathy towards them.

3.4.1 Ebb and flow of experience: 'surfing the waves'

All participants describe the necessity of movement, an ebb and flow, as they consider what they can cope with in relation to the climate crisis. Hazel shares her object, her mobile phone, and describes that she uses it to gain information about the climate crisis, yet there are times when she needs to move away from this, 'I *skim past it, I see it, and I think I can't read that right now*' (Hazel, 97). There are layers to the experience of climate awareness, from information gathering to action, but it's an '*emotional process that's constantly ongoing. It's never done because everything's constantly in process and changing and new things, you know, new headlines, new catastrophes'* (Lily, 242). Lily shares this sense of the continuous, ever-changing landscape of climate awareness and her experience that it is '*never done'*; all participants echo this and describe the need for movement between engagement and avoidance, energy and despair, action and inaction.

For example, Heath describes this experience when he explains the process of writing a paper about the climate crisis:

> *Just before summer, umm so it took about two years to write just because it was really tricky to write, you know, emotionally, but just before summer umm, I authored a paper specifically looking at the climate crisis […] it took, yeah, two years, partly COVID, but partly, you know, I'd write a chunk of it, and just get so, like, 'oh God, this is awful', and then have to leave it for a while [laughs]* (Heath, 352)

Heath explains how difficult this project has been for him to undertake, largely due to the emotional toll, '*tricky to write […] emotionally'*. Indeed, the despair in his voice is evident: '*oh God, this is awful'*, which simultaneously expresses anguish, and is pleading to God, perhaps wishing for the anguish to stop. I have understood Heath's experience of ebb and flow to be somewhat out of his control, the breaks from writing dictated by how he feels and needing to escape this sense of anguish. I interpreted his laughter to suggest a sense of how uncomfortable that experience was for Heath, and even in the here and now his efforts to escape or minimise what that felt like for him.

For Fern, the experience of ebb and flow can be seen more broadly within her lifetime. Having explained that as a young person she wrote and performed songs to engage people with climate issues, she shares her experience growing up:

> *But then, once I left university, so sort of more into a workplace, […] it just never got spoken about, it just got lost. We just stopped talking about it. And I can't remember exactly when it came back into consciousness*. (Fern, 266)

Like Heath, there is a sense that this happened unconsciously for Fern. Her extract adds nuance to the experience of ebb and flow, allowing for depth of understanding; it highlights how unconscious this experience can be, and suggests there is no timeframe for the ebb and flow experience. Fern says, '*it just got lost'*, which denotes that her climate awareness simply ceased to exist for a time, and she did not know where it went. I have understood her repetition of '*just'* as implying a simplicity to this experience, having been actively climate aware, it wasn't an intentional choice to stop engaging, but perhaps climate issues were incompatible with her lifestyle at that time, as she embarked on a career, and there was a natural ebb away from them.

For Jasmine, the experience of ebb and flow is observed through her use of wave metaphors throughout her interview. For example:

> *It's definitely a kind of a wave function. Like I'll be fine and then something… then I might go down for a bit and then I'll come back*. (Jasmine, 146)

And later:

> *I've only started seeing individual clients in the last few months when I feel like I'd, I've got to a place where I'm far better at sort of surfing… surfing the waves*. (Jasmine, 328)

Waves denote a sense of movement, ebb as the tide moves out to sea and flow as it steadily returns, and perhaps this reveals the essence of the experience of the climate crisis for Jasmine; through her use of these metaphors, she is sharing her experience of navigating the back and forth of the climate crisis and being knocked '*down for a bit'* by '*something'*. Which I have understood as exposure to external information, such as the news or her client work:

I might be in a good place with it umm… and I think sometimes part of the coping is not getting too involved in the news all the time and giving myself a break. And then you might have a session and someone's talking about a lot of that stuff, and you'll come out and then suddenly it's all very present for you again (Jasmine, 402)

Someone who surfs does not fight these powerful waves, but learns to move with them, riding their natural tide, so I have interpreted her use of the metaphor, '*surfing the waves',* to suggest this as her way to cope with the ever-changing landscape of climate awareness and the lack of control she feels. If waves cannot be navigated, it results in drowning, and perhaps this indicates what is at stake for Jasmine if she does not manage to surf the waves, she will become overwhelmed, drowning in too much information, and a sea of emotion. For Jasmine, '*these emotions come and go'*(401) and engaging with the experience of ebb and flow, '*giving myself a break'* and '*surfing the waves'* is about moving away from information when it becomes too much, or learning how to manage this, particularly when working with clients experiencing similar issues.

3.4.2 Navigating guilt: 'I'm a good person'

Continuing to explore participants' experience of the strain that comes with climate awareness, several participants share a sense of guilt, self-criticising what they do, or don't do, to engage with climate issues. In some cases, they shared a sense of comparison with others and felt the need to justify their choices, while in others there is an experience of pressure from themselves to choose wisely in relation to being climate conscious and holding themselves to account. For example, Rose explains her experience:

In fact, it's probably a lot of people my age, they've got the sort of time on their hands, haven't they? But I'm not… perhaps that's sort of feeling that actually I could or should be

doing something and I'm not, apart from recycling and doing the small things, you know using public transport, trying to protect and respect the environment, my immediate environment, that's all I… and I just feel a bit frustrated with my own inadequacy (Rose, 374)

Rose shares that she is frustrated by feeling inadequate in her efforts to support climate issues; the impact of her age is felt again here, when she compares herself with others in her age group, who she assumes to have more time on their hands to be able to do more environmentally. I have understood '*actually I could or should'* as a sense of responsibility resulting from this comparison. Rose's experience of comparing herself to her age group enabled me to reflect at a deeper level on what she felt guilt about, and her repetition of '*I'm not'* and when she says, '*that's all I…*', followed by a pause, I have interpreted as her experience of this guilt at not doing more. It seems that this experience of guilt is exacerbated by her sense of responsibility and feeling that her actions are insufficient when compared to others in her age group. She lists what she does do environmentally, and I wonder if this is her attempt at justification within the interview, perhaps feeling uncomfortable as we talk, that she is exposing herself for not doing more, and in her eyes, not doing enough.

Fern's experience is similar; as she explains how significant the feelings of guilt are for her, she reflects on selfishness, '*I've had to look at the selfishness around it […] I need my car, I need to be able to take my car places, I can't afford a car that is newer, or is electric'* (621). Fern describes how uncomfortable these feelings of guilt and selfishness are to explore, and explains that she finds herself justifying her choices:

I was thinking how I automatically jump to, well, 'I've been a vegetarian, you know, since 1997', so you know, that was something that I did as sort of a part of contributing to thinking, 'oh well I can… that will make a difference', you know. […] when we start to think about

those things, I realize how I'm trying, we're trying, to justify ourselves all the time, 'well, I'm a good person when it comes to the climate as opposed to these bad people who pollute', but actually we all have a bit of both. (Fern, 678)

Fern explains that she '*automatically jumps to'* justification, and I have understood her use of automatically to suggest that this is done without conscious thought, and perhaps acts as a way of coping with feelings of guilt at what she is not doing, and her perception of selfishness around that. Perhaps this refers to a feeling of responsibility to engage in climate issues; her experience of this and the resulting guilt at not doing what is expected is emphasised when she explains the sense of constant justification, *'all the time'*, perhaps also signifying the strain of this experience. Her shift from '*I'm trying'* to '*we're trying*' might suggest that she views the responsibilities more broadly as societal expectations and the collective need to justify ourselves. I have understood this as she continues, referring to the experience of people positioning themselves as good people as opposed to bad people, and perhaps a suggestion that we compare ourselves to each other, either increasing or decreasing feelings of guilt. Later she reflects on this sense of comparison and her experience of it during the COVID-19 pandemic, *'it came up a bit also during covid, that idea about there's those of us who are trying to do something positive, and then there's those of us who aren't'* (725). I have interpreted this as Fern's experience of society's moral compass associated with being good or bad, caring about the environment or not, and evoking feelings of guilt when we consider ourselves 'bad' in relation to societal expectations.

Rose and Fern's experiences enabled me to reflect on Heath's experience of guilt and there is a slight divergence; he has recognised the importance of accepting the limits of personal responsibility, and perhaps not judging himself too harshly. He describes that the young people he works with feel a pressure to '*do, do, do, do, you know, action, action, action*' (Heath 747) at the expense of their mental health. He explains his experience:

> *My personal journey and sort of talking with people who are on that with me and through these sorts of magazines, you kind of learn you know what, it's not all me, and actually it is okay to go and buy a McDonalds every once in a while, that isn't going to destroy the world, you know, it's not great, but I want a McDonalds and I'm not going to beat myself up over it [laughing]* (Heath, 766)

Heath's journey of awareness and exploring what the climate crisis means has supported him to make sense of his sense of personal responsibility. For Heath, the significance of recognising '*it's not all me'* has allowed him to challenge the idea that one action can '*destroy the world'*. Indeed, I have understood his use of the idiom, '*beat myself up'* to mean when someone unnecessarily criticises oneself about something they have done and cannot change. His assertion that he would not do this if he had a McDonalds might suggest he has experience of criticising himself about this or something similar, perhaps indicating that he felt a sense of guilt in the past. I initially interpreted the laugh that follows this as an indication of his own sense of hyperbole, perhaps recognising how minor eating a McDonalds is compared to this powerful description that it might '*destroy the world'*. With hindsight, the laugh sounds shallow and sad, and perhaps it suggests the lasting impact of what it was like to feel this guilt in the past, and the sadness that this evokes now.

3.4.3 Making sense of others' inertia: 'I don't kind of blame anyone'

The exploration of inaction is coursing through all participants' experiences, from the necessity of ebb and flow, to understanding their own self-criticism at not doing more. This subtheme considers specifically how some participants try to make sense of other's inaction, or denial, recognising at its core, the strain of the climate crisis experience. This experience is underpinned by a sense of empathy from these participants, who want to understand and recognise why there

is a struggle for people to engage with the climate crisis. Given that participants are psychologists and counsellors, it is reasonable that they might naturally reflect on others' experiences as part of the process of making sense of their own. For example, Lily uses her knowledge and training in psychology to empathise and understand inaction and denial:

> *I definitely feel that there's something that really makes sense to me about umm, society's reactions, my reactions, other people's reactions… because of my understanding of trauma and how our nervous system works and how dysregulated we get, and also how we've learned culturally to just numb ourselves out […] it makes sense, right? So, I don't kind of blame anyone, you know* (Lily, 353)

For Lily, inertia is an understandable response to the situation of the climate crisis when viewed through her professional lens, emphasised by her repetition that it '*makes sense'*. She considers trauma responses, for example, dysregulation, but more than that, she recognises the cultural norm to '*numb ourselves'* to situations that are complex, traumatic, and uncomfortable. From this I have understood that Lily acknowledges society's need for self-protection, the value of being able to detach from that thing that causes distress and brings temporary relief. Later, Lily reflects historically on the value of detachment when she considers previous eras such as World War Two, or the Cold War, and having to live through those periods, "*there was a real way of disconnection that made all that possible*" (372). I have understood this to suggest that for Lily, to survive the threats that come from war, and risk of nuclear war, embracing the sense of numbing allows people to cope and survive, '*I don't kind of blame anyone'*. Lily's empathy and psychological awareness enables her to go some way towards accepting society's reactions to this new kind of war on climate, and the existential threat that it brings.

Lily's experience of trying to understand inertia enabled me to reflect on Rose's experience, when she shares one of the main concerns brought to her clinical practice by young people: *"they'll say, 'what's the point? We live in a world that's effectively dying'"* (149). She later continues this exploration:

> *I think it's just their overwhelming feeling that they're on this track going in one direction and they're sort of frantically trying to pull back with no sense that it's making too much of a difference.* (Rose, 234)

Rose makes sense of the young people's feelings of '*what's the point'*, and I have understood this to be her acknowledging their feelings of powerlessness; her use of '*track'*, and '*one direction'* suggest the sense that her clients feel that the climate crisis is unstoppable, on a path that cannot be redirected, and they do not feel that their efforts to '*pull back'*, to change path, make much of an impact. This echoes Rose's earlier reflections, when she attempts to make sense of apathy as she describes her neighbours' unwillingness to recycle:

> *There's recycling where I live and it couldn't be easier, and yet I should think […] about half of us actually recycle, and the rest just chuck everything in the general waste. And it's honestly, they couldn't have made it more easy and still people don't do it! And I think some of the simple things that we could be doing… I mean whether it's that people think 'actually is my bit of recycling really going to make a difference to a massive world? Probably not.' Possibly it's that… but I just get a feeling there's quite a lot of apathy and I find that… I do find that quite hard.*(Rose, 193)

From this I have understood her discomfort with others' indifference, emphasised when describing how easy recycling is, and through her tone of incredulity as she says, '*and still people don't do*

it!'. As she continues, there is a transition from describing their inaction to trying to make sense of it, denoted by a pause, '*we could be doing… I mean whether it's that people think',* perhaps this indicates the natural evolution of curiosity to make sense of this inertia. I have understood her use of '*massive world'* to emphasise perhaps her understanding of how insignificant some of these actions might feel to others, and even herself, and explain why there is such a sense of apathy, hinting at her clients' experiences of '*what's the point'*. She moves from talking about inaction in relation to recycling, to a general sense of apathy that she has noticed, marked by the pause after '*that…*', perhaps signifying a moment to reflect on her general feeling, and her struggle seeing the indifference, '*I do find that quite hard'*. Like Lily, Rose is trying to make sense and understand why others are not active which could stem from their struggle with the apathy that surrounds them.

For Hazel, this experience of making sense of others' denial is recent, as she explains that at the time of interview, she has been reading a book that enables her to reflect on her experience of denial, "*I'm understanding more about the psychology of it, and I just can see all the different forms of denial"* (34). Later, she acknowledges her own struggle with what happens when one no longer has the protection of denial:

> *I think when the denial falls away, all the various types, it just means that there's nothing, there's no buffer in the way of seeing. And I think it just makes life really hard. Every decision... you know, if you've got some form of denial, you can kind of just merrily carry on consuming* (Hazel, 121)

Perhaps this signifies her starting to make sense of denial, as she explores her own feelings around this. Hazel acknowledges that life after awareness is '*really hard'*, alluding to the responsibility and strain that awareness brings with it. For Hazel, the removal of this '*buffer'* of

denial might pertain to her recognition that denial is a form of protection, a way to shield oneself from the hard reality of the climate crisis. Indeed, the pause after '*every decision…*' I have understood to emphasise that for Hazel these decisions are marked by pressure and responsibility, no longer able to '*merrily'* consume without a care in the world. I have interpreted this extract as Hazel's acknowledgment that there is a sense of sacrifice that comes with her climate awareness and the choices that she makes. Although her overarching experience of other's inertia is one of frustration, emphasised by her tone when she says, *"I struggle to understand that I really do, this sort of carelessness with which we treat the thing that we need to live off."* (173), perhaps as she continues to develop awareness and empathy towards this experience, this might represent her experience of starting to make sense of others' disavowal, and the struggle of shedding denial.

3.5 GET 4: Adapting to the climate crisis as talking therapists

Developing from the previous themes, this GET attempts to explore participants' experience of adapting to the climate crisis, as talking therapists. Participants have shared their experiences of aloneness, vulnerability, and strain, and as such, participants reflected their experience of exploring their roles alongside this changing landscape. There are two subthemes, the first considers their experience as individuals and the ongoing nature of seeking purpose through their roles as talking therapists. The second explores their experience of psychology and their profession more broadly, considering collective responsibility, and their experience of the absence of this meaningful engagement shown by the profession and their professional bodies so far.

3.5.1 Seeking individual purpose: 'it felt like I could actually be doing something'

This subtheme explores all participants' ongoing experience of seeking purpose and defining their individual roles as talking therapists to engage with this; some are beginning to find purpose through identifying themselves as climate aware, '*putting a line on my website'* (Hazel, 561), for

others, there is a focus on the value of working systemically, being open to the possible influence of the climate crisis, and naming it in sessions, '*it's ok to name these things… and clients react, they have feelings about it'* (Fern, 947), while others found purpose through engaging in activism, '*I think, as a psychologist, there's a much more activist kind of side that I'm interested in'* (Lily, 208).

For Fern, the awareness of the impact of the climate crisis on mental health is not acknowledged: "*I think it gets, sometimes it can get a bit missed, how much it's having an impact on mental health*" (Fern, 14). For her, there is importance in naming and normalising the experience with adult clients and recognising it contextually in her clinical practice: *"it occurred to me that actually, young people are wanting to talk about it, but maybe there's a want to talk about it as adults, as well. We're not doing it."* (Fern, 385). Later there is a sense of exploration as Fern considers her purpose:

> *It is just activism has never been something that's come very… very naturally to me, I'm never going to actually be able to push myself over into doing, […] so then it starts me thinking, well, if I can't… if, if, that's not something that I'm sort of ready for, what, what can I do? And actually, being one of those psychologists, therapists, who recognises it and the impact on mental health and contributes to the conversation […] would be really important* (Fern, 771)

Fern explains that activism does not suit her, and perhaps there is a sense of activism being too much for her, '*push myself over into doing'* implies forcing oneself, that I have understood to indicate her discomfort of the anticipated experience of '*doing'*. Indeed, later Fern shares her experience of activism as doing '*big things'* (910), and perhaps for Fern, this denotes that she understands activism as being extreme. Fern's tone is hesitant in this extract, and there are

several pauses and repetitions of words, '*if I can't… if, if*', and '*what, what'*, that I have understood as her experience of exploring purpose; the hesitancy suggests that these are in-the-moment reflections. I have interpreted her use of present tense, '*so then it starts me thinking*', and '*if that's not something I'm ready for'*, to suggest this is an evolving experience for Fern. Additionally, her use of '*would be*' is aspirational, and I have interpreted this to suggest that she might not see herself contributing to the conversation currently, but she would like to. Although it seems that Fern is unsure of her purpose and what she can do in relation to the climate crisis now, there is a sense that doing *something* is important to her, and as her experience with the climate crisis evolves, so too does her experience of exploring her purpose.

Similarly, Hazel shares her experience of the ongoing nature of seeking purpose, and the relief she felt when she found out that she could be a climate aware practitioner:

> *There was a big part of me that was concerned about climate change and nature depletion and biodiversity loss, all of that… And it was there, [gestures in front] over here somewhere… And then there was my work, and I thought I'd have to keep it separate, and then when I realised that actually I could maybe combine the two, it was such a relief and it felt like I could actually be doing something, and doing something positive* (Hazel, 52)

Hazel's gesture as she says that her concerns about climate change were '*over here somewhere*' indicates a sense of separation between her personal experiences and her professional day-to-day life. Reflecting at a deeper level, I understood that there might have been a psychological compartmentalisation, which could indicate that Hazel has felt the climate crisis as a distinct issue that does not belong in her professional life. I interpreted her repetition of '*actually'* as denoting her inclusion of the climate within her work being a recent experience, emphasising a change from what was, and perhaps a sense of surprise that she can merge the two worlds that have, for

Hazel, been quite separate. Later she adds, '*I don't know how far I want to go into it'* (564), with regards to this merging, and I have understood this as Hazel's ongoing sense of her purpose evolving as she continues to consider the extent ('*how far'*) she will merge the climate crisis with her work. As Hazel continues to adapt to the climate crisis, perhaps this will continue to evolve.

Meanwhile diverging slightly, I have understood Rose's experience of seeking purpose through her in-the-moment reflections explaining her recognition of not feeling purposeful:

> *Well actually, Poppy, I want you to know that having the chance to talk to you for half an-, I know we haven't finished, but I'm thinking* that's *what my problem is. I'm not used to not doing anything. It's been* illuminating *for me. I'm not used to not doing anything. That's why this is so difficult for me* (Rose, 439)

For Rose, our conversation has enabled her to recognise that she does not feel she has a purpose within the climate crisis, and she shares a sense of discomfort at this experience of not doing anything. This extract reflects Rose's in-the-moment thoughts, which I have understood by her use of the present tense, '*I want you to know',* and *'I'm thinking'*. She repeats, '*I'm not used to not doing anything*' which I have interpreted as an emphasis of her discomfort at her lack of feeling purpose; this is not a usual experience for Rose, and she understands that this is why her experience of the climate crisis has felt difficult, shared throughout the interview, for example, '*my own gloomy feelings'* (180), and '*my gloomy perspective'* (209). Later she expands:

> *It's been illuminating for me to have the, I haven't had a discussion like this with anyone previously and actually it's brought up all sorts. I'm not usually a sitting around moaning person. I'm usually, 'well, right, okay, you're allowed to moan for a bit, now, what are you*

going to do to get on track?' And I haven't done that with this, my usual way of operating. I, I've completely ditched it. (Rose, 745)

Rose's recognition that she has not yet found a meaningful way to engage with climate issues is further reflected here. I have understood Rose's use of the word '*moan'* to denote her overall feeling of helplessness, echoed throughout the interview, as she expresses a sense of the suffering and dissatisfaction she feels about the climate crisis. This contrasts with her usual experience of being proactive, and she shares an extract of inner dialogue here which I have interpreted through her switch between 'you' and 'I': '*I'm usually'*, and '*you're allowed to moan [*…] *what are you going to do to get on track*'. As Rose continues, *'I haven't done that with this'*, there is a tone of incredulity, perhaps suggesting her own surprise as she becomes aware of her experience of passivity in relation to climate issues. The slight hesitation as she says, '*I, I've completely ditched it'* I have understood as her noticing that she has given up her usual way of operating.

It seems that Rose's sense of hopelessness is relieved by our conversation and acknowledging that she has lacked purpose, which I have interpreted in the repetition of '*illuminating'* between extracts, and her describing the interview as a '*chance to talk'* and sharing that '*it's brought up all sorts'*. This suggests that she views the interview as an opportunity to give this topic greater reflection and it has resulted in helping her to clarify this experience of discomfort at not doing more, perhaps indicating the experience of seeking purpose, and that she might begin exploring this further moving forward.

3.5.2 Frustration at lack of collective engagement in psychology: 'shaking the profession awake'

Developing from the previous subtheme, some participants describe thinking more broadly about their profession and the recognition of their professional responsibility to engage collectively and meaningfully with the climate crisis. Yet, most participants recognise that they do not feel there is a shared sense of this responsibility, and they describe their experience of the absence of any direction or unity when it comes to working with climate issues. For example, Lily shares her experience of this, and emphasises this sense of the collective responsibility:

> *We as health professionals sign up to be authentic, to be truth telling, to helping clients integrate the bigger picture. And in a way, I think there's a big collusion going on with climate change, and we're all kind of in it, and part of this kind of systemic difficulty in facing up to it, that jars to me with our kind of ethical moral, umm, role as mental health professionals* (Lily,145)

Here, Lily explains her experience of the ethical duty she feels health professionals have to work with climate issues. She positions herself within the collective, '*we as health professionals'*, and I understood her sense of the power she holds professionally here, reflected earlier when she says: "*it's much more powerful if I stand up as a psychologist and stand in my role as a psychologist and have a message, rather than as myself, as Lily"* (124). This emphasises her commitment to utilising her power to engage meaningfully with this shared responsibility. Indeed, as she continues, I have understood '*sign up'* to evoke this sense of commitment, of duty, to uphold this responsibility as a mental health professional. As Lily lists some of the core ethical principles of therapeutic work, authenticity, truth telling, and helping clients to integrate with the bigger picture, there is a sense of dissatisfaction that Lily feels climate issues have been neglected, '*there's a big collusion going on […] and we're all*

kind of in it'. I have understood when Lily says, '*that jars to me'*, to suggest that this collusion has a disagreeable effect on her, perhaps due to the incongruence she feels when comparing the collusion to these core ethical principles she holds as a psychologist. From this, I have understood Lily's experience of the collective responsibility in psychology but recognise too, her experience of contradiction as she exposes the '*systemic difficulty in facing up to it'*, and perhaps her experience that collectively the profession is not yet doing this.

This is echoed by Jasmine, who emphasises the value of psychology within the climate crisis:

> *The climate crisis is an existential threat, and you know it touches in on meaning, value, existence, death, life. And that's you know, kind of what psychology should be good at. So, I think there's kind of my personal role, but maybe for the professional body or as a member of the profession, kind of shaking the profession awake* (Jasmine, 495)

Here Jasmine is considering her role and explains that psychology is primed to engage with existential threats such as the climate crisis; yet as she continues, her experience suggests that as a collective, psychology is not engaging with this issue. When she says, '*should be'*, I have understood this as an indication of the conditional mood and referring to what is possible but emphasising that psychology and the professional bodies are perhaps yet to fully engage with climate issues. This is further highlighted as she continues, '*shaking the profession awake'* which is a powerful metaphor to indicate Jasmine's experience of the profession's lack of engagement and her frustration with this. I have understood '*shaking'* as her desire to unsettle the profession, agitate it, to encourage more engagement from the professional bodies, perhaps also suggestive of her feelings of exasperation at the profession in general for not doing more; and '*awake'* suggests Jasmine's understanding that they are not conscious of climate issues, or perhaps even

the value of their position within this situation. At the core of this extract, there is a sense of the duty held by psychology to be more active and engaged with the climate crisis, and indeed Jasmine later says, "*I really think psychology should be showing a lot of leadership here"* (523), emphasising this sense that psychological professional bodies have a duty to be more actively involved. Jasmine's repeated use of '*should'* in both extracts I have understood as a criticism of their lack of action, and perhaps emphasises her experience of disappointment in relation to their lack of involvement so far.

This sense of disappointment is echoed and developed by Heath, who describes his feelings towards educational psychology: "*I'm probably quite negative professionally about what we haven't done"* (484). For Heath, perhaps his experience of the collective responsibility centres on what the profession are not doing, and he explains:

> *There's no attention professionally, for example, on the carbon footprint of our profession. There's no point, there's no point kind of sitting there saying, 'oh, okay, well, we'll help a child who's panicking, but in terms of our delivery and our carbon footprint, we're not going to do anything'. So, there's a real kind of… for me it feels hypocritical, you know, surely before you start offering help out there, get your house in order and, you know, have a good systemic approach to how you're going to be sort of, not only supporting adaptation and mitigation, but actually prevention as well* (Heath, 472)

Heath describes his negative feelings about the profession as a collective, and his experience of them together not doing more to engage with climate issues. Heath's tone and his repetition of '*there's no point'*, I have interpreted as agitation as he talks about this experience, and the negative sentiment he feels towards his profession's lack of accountability. Heath shares his sense of the professional responsibility as '*not only supporting adaptation and mitigation, but*

actually prevention as well', yet his experience seems to be that his profession is not focused on these issues. Indeed, for Heath there is a sense that the profession focuses more on supporting individuals navigate their emotional responses to the climate crisis, '*we'll help a child who's panicking'.* Later, Heath adds, "*we can't just be thinking about, you know, sterilising children out of their anxiety"* (489), and I have understood this as suggestive of his experience of the profession attempting to protect children from the distress by concentrating on working with the anxious feeling in an attempt '*sterilise'*, to remove these feelings altogether. For Heath, there is a sense that the broader issues are being ignored, and I have understood his use of the phrase, '*get your house in order"* to suggest Heath's feeling that the profession should organise themselves collectively in relation to the climate crisis before they can engage meaningfully with it and support individuals through it. For Heath, the lack of engaging with collective responsibility is '*hypocritical',* that is, he views his profession behaving in a way that is inauthentic to their values, so focusing on supporting young people through climate distress before they've considered collectively their professional responsibility to the climate. This highlights Heath's experience of the frustration at the lack of collective engagement with climate issues, while emphasising his sense of the responsibility that they should feel to engage meaningfully within the climate crisis.

3.6 Analytic Reflexivity

As I employed the idiographic commitment of IPA and began working on the analysis of each case individually, I kept in mind the importance placed on bracketing my ideas as they were coming up (Smith et al., 2022). Initially as I was working during weekends, I found this easier to do because I had five days focusing elsewhere and could come back to the data with fresh eyes. However, I realised that this also kept me disconnected from the data and the experiences, unable to keep participant accounts in mind if their analysis took more than one weekend, which they inevitably did. Once I recognised the need for more sustained time to allow for immersion in the

data, I took leave from work with the aim of giving myself time so that I could focus and immerse more in the research.

As I began to analyse, I continued to embrace my reflexivity as part of this process. I had to embrace my self-awareness throughout, and particularly when bracketing given my close connection to this topic and my influence upon it. I did not wish to switch off my experiences and feelings but embrace them, ensuring that I reflected on them, and on the power I held as researcher, analysing transcripts, and the responsibility I felt to my participants.

My own role as a counselling psychology trainee has played a part in this, and I realise that I approached this research from a position of curiosity and ethical concern, having been unsure how to engage with the client who raised their climate distress. At times this approach contrasted with my participants, some of whom identify as social activists within the environmental sphere. While social justice advocacy is an integral value associated with talking therapy professions (Winter, 2023), I found myself grappling with how to engage with the climate crisis. I was conscious of my own hesitancy in exploring an issue that, despite its undeniable psychological and humanitarian impact, could be perceived as political.

As a result of this, I endeavoured to make sure that any experiential statements and PETs were founded in my interpretation of the participant experience, while engaging in the process of bracketing to identify my experiences and extricate them from that of the participants. For example, I had to become aware of how my non-activist stance shaped my reading of participants' accounts. While this is an experience that I empathised with, and appreciated hearing, I had to reflect on *my* experience of the climate crisis. As a result, I ensured that when I noticed any themes emerging across accounts, or if I was drawn to particular experiences, I would make a note of these. This was in an effort to acknowledge them, and intentionally put them to one side,

consequently bracketing them from the current idiographic account. I also made efforts to actively challenge myself if similar themes arose by thinking about other ways that the data could be interpreted, or by considering my own assumptions and motivations.

While the research question had originally focused on clinical experiences, I had always anticipated that personal experience would form part of that. This assumes intersubjectivity, that is, my understanding that the personal will impact the professional, and vice versa (O'Brien, 2010). I had anticipated that for the participants to make sense of their experiences within clinical practice, they would refer to their personal experiences, and there would be a level of overlap of the professional and personal experience. Yet what I have found is that not only did the participants share particularly rich accounts of their personal experiences, but that I was more interested in these accounts. Upon reflection, perhaps this is due to my personal experiences as a practitioner; I am only at the start of my journey within counselling psychology and while I am still early in that process, my personal experiencing of the climate crisis might feel more pertinent to me than my professional experience, which is why the findings have felt more personal. Although the participants' professional experience within therapeutic work does course through the analysis, I am reminded of this assumption of intersubjectivity and the inevitable intersection between professional and personal experiences.

Inevitably the process of analysis continued as I began writing up, and I struggled to reduce the large volume of data I had collected. I did not want to lose information that was essential to participants' accounts, and as such I found myself being more discerning at choosing extracts, considering which ones have more metaphor or are richer with emotion. I also returned regularly to the participants' full accounts to ensure that I had not missed the essence of their experience while constructing my GETs. The construction of subthemes supported me to fully embrace the GETs, but this process was dynamic and complex as I engaged with the hermeneutic circle and

moved between the parts and the whole. Although I began writing with an overview of the GETs in mind, I noticed that as I engaged with the hermeneutic circle and moved between the parts and the whole, these GETS and subthemes changed slightly to reflect the ongoing process of analysis and interpretation. At times there were overlaps of GETs and subthemes, and I needed to go back to the participant accounts to dig further into the essence of the experience. For example, the subtheme of 'ebb and flow' began as a GET, but as the GET of 'strain of climate awareness' developed, and I went back and forth between participants accounts, I decided that the experience of ebb and flow formed part of this experience recognising the strain.

Indeed, at various points I questioned my findings and found that leaning on the data supported me to move forward; for example, I had not anticipated Heath's divergent experience of otherness, reflected through his rejection of 'hippie'. As such, as this emerged, I found myself trying to consider alternative interpretations of this experience, returning to his audio, to relisten to what was being said to ensure that I was grounding this interpretation in the data. There were regular points of uncertainty as I constructed the GETs, and I frequently returned to each case to cross-reference and confirm that they were not something I had invented. Developing subthemes to substantiate the GETs not only increased my confidence in them, but it also enabled me to be more rigorous ensuring that GETs were rooted in the participant experiences.

Chapter Four: Discussion

4.1 Overview

The aim of this study has been to explore how U.K. talking therapists experience the climate crisis both personally and professionally. In keeping with this objective, I embraced Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as my methodology of exploration and analysis. This chapter will start by providing a summary of the findings. I will then move on to situate these findings theme by theme in relation to existing literature and consideration will be given to how they might support or diverge from existing research. The findings will then be situated within the broader existential literature which speaks to the human experience of participants, as well as considering compassion theory as an explanatory framework. Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) has also been drawn upon as a potential framework for talking therapists to consider as a response to these findings, and as they existentially navigate the climate crisis. I also include reflections on the implications of this study for Counselling Psychology. Finally, the study is evaluated, limitations explored, and areas for further research discussed, before concluding with personal reflexivity on the research process.

4.2 Summary of findings

This study constructed four themes and associated subthemes. The first theme emphasises the experience of aloneness; the climate crisis evokes a sense of isolation not just due to the individual and personal emotional intensity of the lived experience of it, but also through feeling disconnected from loved ones and more broadly, society, who are at different states of awareness and acceptance. The second theme focuses on the experience of vulnerability when faced with the existential threat of the climate crisis; as this threat grows more tangible, the participants experience the threat of its proximity, and hopeless to stop it. Their overwhelm at its impact contributes to the sense of vulnerability, and there is recognition of the power the climate crisis

holds over the natural world, and by extension, themselves. The third theme centres around the experience of the strain of climate awareness; the burden of holding awareness reflected through the need to intermittently move away from the climate crisis. It considers the emotional toll of feeling like they are not doing enough, and the associated guilt of this, while also trying to understand and empathise with the societal response of denial and inertia. The final theme captures the experience of professional adaptation to the climate crisis, and it highlights their sense of purpose as talking therapists to engage with climate work individually, but also the ethical duty to engage more broadly with these issues. This theme emphasises their experience of shifting roles in psychology, their dissatisfaction with the current response to the climate crisis, and their sense of responsibility to expand their professional identities and contribute to social justice and change.

4.3 Findings in relation to relevant literature

In this section, I aim to ground these findings through exploring them in relation to the existing literature. Four GETs emerged from the analysis reflecting how participants experienced the climate crisis. I hope that an exploration of these key themes in relation to the literature will substantiate them by situating them within the existing literature to establish how they are consistent with research or diverge from it and reveal original findings.

1. Alone at the heart of the climate crisis
2. Vulnerability in the face of existential threat
3. The strain of climate awareness
4. Adapting to the climate crisis as talking therapists

4.3.1 Alone at the heart of the climate crisis

The experience of aloneness was a key theme that developed from this research and was determined by the construction of three subthemes. This GET encapsulates the deeply personal, profound, and isolating nature of emotional responses to the climate crisis, which echoes the significant amount of literature that explores emotional responses to the climate crisis and how varied, complex, and painful these can be (Weintrobe, 2021; Hickman, 2020; Pihkala, 2022a; 2022b; Ogunbode et al, 2022). Indeed, feelings of aloneness and isolation have commonly featured in blogs about emotional responses to the climate crisis (Clayton & Karazsia, 2020). These findings introduce further dimensions of aloneness regarding interpersonal experiences, and the feelings of otherness.

Several participants shared how emotionally intense their experience of the climate crisis has been, highlighting the isolating nature of their emotional responses to it. While research acknowledges that strong emotional responses are common (Stanley et al, 2024), in my findings, there was a sense that these feelings needed to be understood individually before they could be processed and shared more publicly. For example, Jasmine referring to it as '*being in the fire'* (158) represents how personal and necessarily isolating this experience felt to her. The findings in this study emphasise how highly individual emotional responses to the climate crisis are, and particularly highlights the need for reflection as individuals process feelings of grief, anxiety, and fear.

The deeply personal nature of the emotional experience aligns with previous research that has explored eco-anxiety (Clayton & Karazsia, 2020) and ecological grief (Cunsolo & Ellis, 2018). Several participants shared that grief had been a prime emotion for them, but their experiences of this, while similar, held different meaning, for example, Jasmine grieved the loss of trees that

have meant so much to her personally, while Lily reflected more broadly on anticipated grief for the natural world represented in her object, a dandelion thistle paperweight. This supports the literature about solastalgia that emphasises how personal grief is for an individual and recognises the pain of losing that thing that means so much and how that can deeply impact upon a person's sense of self (Comtesse et al, 2021).

The findings in relation to the necessity of reflection over these personal experiences is particularly relevant; many participants described the climate crisis as not only an external event but as something that has forced internal engagement and reflection. This aligns with the growing body of research that suggests climate emotions are not only reactions to environmental stimuli but reflections of an individual's values, identity, and worldview (Stanley et al., 2021). Literature has suggested that talking therapists should 'do the work' and reflect on their personal experiences of the climate crisis (Seaman, 2016; Weintrobe, 2021), and this study offers support to the existing research and develops it. The experience of personal emotional engagement with the climate crisis, as found in this study, suggests that psychological adaptation involves more than behavioural or cognitive responses; it requires a deeper, personal, emotional understanding that has yet to be fully explored in literature on this topic.

The growing sense of disconnection from family, friends, and others were experiences shared by most participants in this study. These findings consider the interpersonal difficulties individuals face when attempting to discuss their responses to the climate crisis and supports the theme of aloneness. Participants described feelings of isolation when loved ones were not '*on the same page*' (Hazel, 377) regarding the urgency of the issue, and relief when others shared their concerns. Authors of previous research on the qualitative experiences of the climate crisis

suggest similar findings in relation to the sense of isolation. For example, Budziszewska and Jonsson (2021), who explored psychotherapy clients' experiences of the climate crisis, offered an existential perspective on their findings. The existential theme of relatedness was found to represent the social isolation felt by participants in response to their experiences of disavowal expressed by family members and their communities. This is supported by the findings of this study that indicate a sense of disconnection drives feelings of aloneness.

Moreover, these findings extend research recognising the isolating nature of the climate crisis by adding a layer of complexity to existing studies through distinguishing that the disconnection described by the participants in this study is not simply about indifference to their climate views but disagreement. Most research has recognised there is an absence of climate conversations (Leiserowitz et al., 2019; Norgaard, 2011; Howard et al., 2021) and has recognised this being a way to protect loved ones from worry, or of avoiding ridicule, but it has not distinguished the existence of active disagreement. For example, a qualitative study exploring how U.K based parents manage climate activism alongside parenting, suggest that participants rarely discussed the climate crisis with their extended family (Howard et al., 2021). The findings from this study add to this to suggest that the struggle is not simply about silence within families but of experiences navigating tension and possible conflict with loved ones who do not share the same environmental concerns.

This theme also adds to research into public perceptions and wider conversations about the climate crisis. Literature describes socially organised climate denial, whereby people avoid discussing the climate crisis in social settings because it causes discomfort or anxiety (Norgaard, 2011; Adams, 2013). For those who are deeply engaged with the climate crisis, this silence

creates a sense of otherness from those who may not share the same level of concern, as seen with my participants, for example Hazel's description of '*living in this weird parallel universe'* (682). This study does not simply support research into this but highlights the sense of emotional relief felt by participants when they find connection with people who *do* understand their concerns. This resonates with research on collective coping strategies and the importance of social support in managing climate-related distress (Ojala, 2013; Prosser et al., 2024), but it also highlights the profound impact that small, interpersonal connections can have on individuals' wellbeing.

The findings from this study have emphasised the experience of feeling othered by society, but to add some nuance, there is also an experience of othering done by the participants. Heath's divergence of otherness supports previous research that recognises individuals attempts to distance themselves from other environmentalists, perhaps in an effort for this issue to be taken more seriously. In a qualitative study the term 'hippie' was used pejoratively by participants to detach themselves from any stigma associated with the term by their family and networks (Howard et al., 2021). This supports the suggestion that this sense of otherness can lead to attempts to foreground identities as knowledgeable of climate issues, and distancing from the feeling of otherness that some, such as hippies, might experience (Howard, 2023). This furthers research in this area and recognises the complex desire to distance ourselves from others who we perceive as already othered perhaps in order for the climate crisis to be taken more seriously.

4.3.1.1 Summary

In summary, the findings from this theme support much of the existing literature, while also offering insights into the deeply personal nature of these responses and their impact on relationships. The themes of emotional intensity, disconnection from loved ones, and feelings of otherness result in

the experience of aloneness and isolation which reflects research that recognises these intense emotional responses, the silence around the climate crisis and its denial. However, this study contributes to the literature by emphasising the role of introspection, the relief found in shared understanding, and the tension that can infiltrate interpersonal climate conversations. These findings highlight the value of connection, and the need for talking therapists to come together to share experiences and challenge the aloneness of this experience.

4.3.2 Vulnerability in the face of existential threat

The theme of vulnerability at facing the existential threat posed by the climate crisis was an experience shared by all participants and signifies the participants' personal sense of exposure and vulnerability to harm. This theme was constructed from three subthemes that reflect this deep sense of vulnerability, that is the immediacy of the threat, the perceived helplessness to act effectively, and the overwhelming nature of the crisis.

Participants sense of immediacy highlights their experience of recognising the threat up close, either witnessing climate events themselves or recognising the impacts on those who have, dispelling the common perception that the climate crisis is temporally and geographically distant. This finding is consistent with research considering psychological distance to the climate crisis (Brügger et al., 2015), for example, Fern's surprise at '*actually seeing something'* (77) suggests how distant the crisis had felt to her until that moment. This supports quantitative research acknowledging that most individuals perceive the climate crisis threat as a distant, future event, something that will affect others more than themselves (Leiserowitz et al., 2019).

Looking at this more closely, extant research has suggested that when a person has not felt or witnessed extreme climate events directly, it is easier to psychologically distance from the climate crisis (Brügger et al., 2015). Findings from this study suggest that participants perception of the immediacy of the climate crisis shifted their emotional response, deepening their feelings of vulnerability at this threat, for example, Rose shares, '*suddenly I was emotionally connected with it'* (88). Studies propose that individuals who directly experience climate-related events are more likely to feel concerned by what they have seen, and more likely to act (Reser et al., 2012; Van der Linden, 2015). However, it can also have an adverse effect and feel overwhelmingly threatening, particularly when it becomes personally relevant (Brügger et al, 2015). The findings from this study add to this research by recognising the personal vulnerability that comes with identifying the immediacy of the threat as close to home.

Feeling hopeless was an experience shared by most participants and adds to the experience of vulnerability. Research indicates that hopelessness and powerlessness are common features of climate anxiety (Pihkala, 2022a); hopelessness is recognised as a threat-related emotion alongside fear, worry, anxiety, powerlessness, and dread (Pihkala, 2022a). Participants described feeling uncertain as to how to act effectively to prevent the crisis, with a recognition of their hopelessness through expression of frustration with the perceived lack of meaningful government and leadership responses. Literature indicates that lack of faith in the effectiveness of government action creates feelings of hopelessness (Gupta, 2022) and this is supported by participant accounts in this study: Lily powerfully expresses her experience of this when she reflects that it feels like '*we're just sleepwalking into the tidal wave'* (375). These findings offer a nuanced layer to the concept of hopelessness, as participants acknowledge the tension between wanting to act but feeling disempowered to do so, and at the whim of the powerful 'other'.

Budziszewska and Jonsson's (2021) findings indicate the heightening awareness of death and the finite nature of life, arising from an awakening and recognition of the danger of the climate crisis, resulting in feelings of helplessness. These findings are supported by this study which suggests that the enormity of the climate crisis can evoke mortality salience as participants describe the overwhelming nature of the climate crisis. This suggests a sense of vulnerability at feeling under threat, unable to verbalise the seriousness of the danger that arises from impacts of the climate crisis, for example Hazel's description, *'it's so big, it percolates everything'* (670). The magnitude of these climate issues has spread so far that participants struggled to make sense of the power and scale of the crisis, highlighting the existential nature of this issue. This supports literature that suggest the climate crisis raises existential concerns (Pihkala, 2018; Budziszewska and Jonsson, 2021).

Exploring this further, participants shared their experience of how devastating the climate crisis feels to them, highlighting their overwhelm at the force of nature and a sense of hopelessness at the scale of it. Literature agrees, suggesting that the climate crisis has placed awareness of human mortality at the forefront of our existence (Pihkala, 2018) and participants struggled at various points to put into words their experiences, identifying the impact as simply, '*too big to comprehend'* (Jasmine, 135). Psychological research recognises the struggle for humans to think about events that are slow and long-lasting, with theories acknowledging the human brains evolutionary design to cope with immediate and viable threats (Pahl et al., 2014). Indeed, much of the extant research focuses on anticipatory fears of what the climate crisis will do in the future as it continues to ravage the natural world (Böhm, 2003; Pihkala, 2022). The findings from this study extend this by highlighting how influential our connection with nature is to this feeling of overwhelm. This suggests that those with a greater connection to nature may experience a

greater sense of vulnerability; as environmental degradation is observed, and there is recognition of the inherent threat to humanity from the climate crisis.

4.3.2.1 Summary

This theme highlights the profound psychological impacts of perceiving the climate crisis as an immediate, overwhelming, and insurmountable challenge. These findings support existing literature on psychological distance, helplessness, and existential threat, offering further insights into how individuals experience feelings of helplessness and mortality when confronted with the realities of the crisis. The sense of personal vulnerability highlights the importance of recognising both individual and systemic factors in understanding how people experience the climate crisis. This theme highlights the importance of recognising our humanness as professionals, and the need to connect with this part of ourselves and face the experience of vulnerability.

4.3.3 The strain of climate awareness

This theme captures the emotional toll participants experience from their awareness of the climate crisis and reflects the psychological burden that comes with being deeply engaged with such a daunting global issue. Three subthemes were constructed to explore different aspects of this strain, from the need to distance oneself from the burden of awareness to the emotional complexities of feeling like one is not doing enough and consideration of why others may not engage with the crisis. The findings resonate with existing research and offer insights into the unique struggle of holding awareness of the climate crisis.

The subtheme of ebb and flow describes participants' need to occasionally step back from the climate crisis to avoid being overwhelmed by its emotional weight. For example, Heath was driven to write a paper raising climate awareness for his colleagues. He describes the experience of it as '*tricky to write, you know, emotionally*' (Heath, 352) and explains his need to regularly move away from it. This strategy for coping is consistent with research in the context of climate activism (Howard, 2022) and climate scientists (Hoggett & Randall, 2018), which recognises oscillation, and individuals finding ways to manage their emotional responses to the climate crisis to avoid burnout. The ebb and flow between engagement and withdrawal found in this study reflects the psychological need to create distance from distressing information in order to function normally.

Considering this more closely, what is particularly notable is the recognition of the ebb and flow as a necessary and ongoing process. Participants described their awareness of *needing* space from the crisis to maintain psychological balance, a finding that contrasts with previous literature that often frames avoidance as maladaptive (Brulle & Norgaard, 2019). Instead, participants in this study seem to consciously navigate their need for respite, suggesting that temporary disengagement may be an adaptive coping strategy that allows them to return to the issue with renewed energy. This nuance adds depth to the existing literature, offering a more complex understanding of how individuals manage the psychological strain of climate awareness. Two emergent theoretical perspectives exist that consider this perspective, the retrogressive cycles of awareness (Hawkins & Ryde, 2019), and Pihkala's waking up syndrome model (2022b). Both suggest the dynamic nature of climate awareness as something that isn't simply known but continues to be a process that is navigated. Thus far, there has been little empirical evidence to support these theories, but the findings from this study offer some support towards the experience being a non-linear process, and the value of oscillation, and mindful active avoidance.

Further supporting the theme recognising the emotional strain of the climate crisis, the experience of navigating shame adds to this and connects with literature on moral emotions; in quantitative climate research, anger, guilt, and shame were recognised as moral emotions that arise due to the climate crisis being seen as a moral issue (Böhm et al., 2023; Steentjes et al., 2017; Bassarak et al., 2017). These moral emotions were found to be associated with judgement, and the perception of feeling responsible and blameworthy for the climate crisis and associated events (Böhm & Pfister, 2017). With the climate crisis being a result of human behaviour, intense anger and guilt responses are common (Pihkala, 2022; Hickman et al., 2021). Additionally, if individuals or the groups they associate with feel they are not doing enough to slow the climate crisis, this can also be a source of guilt (Pihkala, 2022a), and the experience of guilt within this study was primarily concerning this. For example, Rose's frustration '*with my own inadequacy*' (377), can be understood as Rose perceiving herself as inferior despite her actions. Indeed, this goes some way to support this existing research by recognising the struggle of participants to juggle wanting to do more, while being unsure about what is good enough. This adds to research that suggests perfectionism is considered a barrier to action in relation to individuals climate efforts (Kennedy-Woodard & Kennedy-Williams, 2022).

Interestingly, this study also highlights how participants, despite feelings of guilt, can remain compassionate in recognising their personal limitations. For example, Heath shares, *'you know what, it's not all me'* (767), articulating his experience of this internal conflict between wanting to do more and understanding what the cost of this could be for his own mental health. This suggests that perhaps talking therapists' training supports them to engage with self-awareness and reflection which might protect them and positively impact on these experiences, supporting them with the emotional strain of the climate crisis. This was also reflected in the capacity of participants to empathise with others' who are not at a place of climate engagement. Although psychology

has attempted to understand issues of denial and avoidance of the climate crisis, the findings of this study highlight the empathic response of talking therapists, who attempt to understand how difficult this experience is. This offers unique insight into the experience of talking therapists, and highlights how empowering the skills equated to talking therapy can be for coping with the emotional strain of climate awareness.

4.3.3.1 Summary

This theme has illustrated how heavy the emotional strain of the climate crisis can be. The three subthemes offer insight into how individuals might cope with this, as well as recognising the complexities of feeling the need to live up to external standards of engagement. The findings offer insight into how talking therapists can navigate these challenges, calling upon their capacity to hold space for themselves, embracing self-compassion for what they can and cannot do, and in sharing empathy towards others who are not yet ready to engage with this issue. This theme highlights the value of psychological skills and indicates the power of self-awareness and importance of developing self-awareness as professionals.

4.3.4 Adapting to the climate crisis as talking therapists

The final theme addresses how participants make sense of their professional roles amidst the evolving landscape of the climate crisis. It emphasises both personal exploration of purpose, and the challenges relating to the perceived lack of collective action within the field of psychology. This theme highlights the complex interplay between personal and professional identity in the context of the climate crisis.

This theme indicates that for talking therapists, the search for purpose is not only personal, but inherently linked to their professional roles as facilitators of psychological and emotional support. The findings highlight that there is not simply one way of adapting to the climate crisis, but a diversity of ways in which these participants have engaged with climate issues as individuals. While some have integrated environmental issues directly into their therapeutic practice, others are still navigating their path, reflecting a broader conversation about the role of psychology in addressing systemic issues. This resonates with research that acknowledges the individual role of the therapist, and the importance of finding ways to engage with the climate crisis in the therapy room (Silva and Coburn, 2022). Yet the findings in this study add to this and suggest that the diversity of engagement emphasises how complex this task is. This indicates that while the climate crisis is an urgent global issue, the personal and professional ways in which talking therapists engage with it can vary significantly, depending on their personal values, career stage, and levels of climate awareness.

Considering this in more detail, it seems that seeking individual purpose as talking therapists is one way in which participants search for meaning within the context of the climate crisis. For example, Hazel shares feeling relief at realising that she could engage with climate issues as part of her professional role, '*it was such a relief and felt like I could actually be doing something'* (55). These experiences reflect the idea that finding purpose in work can provide a buffer against feelings of helplessness and worry that often stem from climate-related concerns (Pihkala, 2022), and offers original insight into the experience of talking therapists.

Indeed, perhaps the struggle and diversity of ways that this has been experienced within this study highlights the need for greater resources, guidance, and training to support the complex

work of talking therapists as climate issues begin to integrate into their professional practice. The findings indicate that there is a place for both individual purpose and the collective engagement of psychology, avoiding a false dichotomy that is often described in the context of the climate crisis between the responsibilities of society and individuals (Räthzel & Uzzell, 2009). Yet participants shared their sense of frustration with the perceived lack of leadership and guidance from professional bodies in psychology when it comes to the climate crisis. This is reflected in growing critique within the field in relation to the slowness of a unified or meaningful response from the discipline (Barnes et al., 2022), and the findings offer empirical support for these opinion pieces.

Indeed, participants expressed a sense of responsibility to engage with the crisis, conveyed powerfully by both Lily and Jasmine:

> '*We as health professionals sign up to be authentic, to be truth telling, to helping clients integrate the bigger picture'* (Lily, 145).

> *'The climate crisis is an existential threat, and you know, it touches on meaning, value, existence, death, life. And that's, you know, kind of what psychology should be good at'* (Jasmine, 495)

However, for participants this responsibility was not reflected in the profession more broadly, creating a sense of disconnect between individual efforts and their professional bodies, with Jasmine reflecting that there is a need for '*shaking the profession awake'* (497). This frustration

is widely observed in literature and as a result, there have been calls for action and papers that consider what the role of psychology in the climate crisis is, urging more thorough involvement (APA, 2022; Chin et al, 2022; Wainwright and Mitchell, 2021). While some professional bodies like the British Psychological Society (BPS) and the UK Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP), have issued statements acknowledging the mental health impacts of the climate crisis, there remains a lack of coordinated action and clear guidance on how practitioners should address these issues in their work (Barnes et al., 2022). Participants' experiences echo these critiques, as they call for more leadership and unity in the field to navigate the complexities of climate-related distress and mental health challenges, adding to empirical support for these urgent calls to action.

These findings are further supported by qualitative research exploring therapist experiences in Australia that recognise how crucial it is that psychological professional bodies provide leadership and guidance to talking therapists (Silva & Coburn, 2022). Indeed, Rhodes and Dunk (2023) present an argument that mainstream psychology is overly focused on the individual, and contend that consequently, psychology is ill-equipped to respond to climate-related issues. The findings here offer nuanced insight by highlighting the frustration felt by participants, and the expectation that professional bodies should do more than simply acknowledge the climate crisis, but also actively create frameworks and initiatives to support talking therapists adapt to this landscape in a meaningful way.

4.3.4.1 Summary

This theme has shed light on participants experiences of making sense of their professional and personal roles in the context of the climate crisis. They have sought to do this through seeking individual purpose as talking therapists as well as their recognition of frustration towards the lack

of collective leadership from the psychological professional bodies. These findings capture the complex experience of living through the climate crisis as a talking therapist. They highlight that while individually engaging with the climate crisis is essential, the field of psychology must do more to foster collective responsibility and offer guidance as to how talking therapists can engage meaningfully with the climate crisis.

4.4 Findings in relation to psychological theory

In this part of the discussion, I intend to review my findings in relation to psychological theory, the aim of which is to further illuminate my understanding and the implications for counselling psychology. I have stayed close to the research question, exploring how U.K talking therapists experience the climate crisis, and focused on theory relevant to the participants' experiences. To consider the identified themes from this research, I have drawn on perspectives from Existentialism and Compassion Theory. Existentialism grounds us in the human experience of participants, recognising the existential nature of the climate crisis, while compassion theory offers an explanatory framework with which to understand my findings. Both will be considered below.

4.4.1 Existential Perspectives

The findings from this study suggest there is an existential dimension to the participants experiences of the climate crisis. Most participants explicitly note the sense of existential threat that comes with awareness of the climate crisis, whether this is through their experiences of vulnerability at its threat or sense of aloneness when it comes to facing the crisis.

Existentialism is an approach underpinned by philosophy that explores what it means to be alive, to be human, and to be tackling the intrinsic challenges that come with that. It has several

conceptualisations within philosophy and psychology, but it is the focus on the subjective experience that unites them (Cooper et al., 2019). Although there is no definitive map for the theoretical components of existential perspectives in psychology, there are recurrent ideas that broadly incorporate the inevitability of human themes of death, isolation, freedom, and meaninglessness (Yalom, 1980). These existential themes help us to understand from a human perspective the experiences of talking therapists as explored in this study.

Humans are innately relational, yet existential theories, like those of Yalom (1980), explore the concept of isolation through three forms: existential, interpersonal, and intrapersonal. Existential isolation refers to the fundamental human experience of facing existence alone, an unbridgeable gap *between* individuals, and extending to the world itself. This study reflects this concept through participants' profound emotional experiences being felt in isolation. Interpersonal isolation refers to the tension between existential isolation and the desire for connection with others (Berry-Smith, 2012), which in this study, is highlighted by the strain climate awareness places on participants' relationships. Participants' experiences underscore the importance of connection, not only with their personal understanding of the climate crisis, but also with those who share similar concerns, and furthermore, with the natural world itself.

Additionally, participants' experiences of vulnerability reflect what is considered the most significant existential concern, death (Van Duerzan, 2023). Indeed, most individuals arguably spend much of life avoiding thoughts of death (Berry-Smith, 2012). Participants' struggles to articulate the profound impact of the crisis, overwhelmed by the sense of impending destruction, and what this means for them, emphasises the existential fear of death, and the vulnerability that

comes with recognising the impact of an irrevocably changing natural world, and consequently one's mortality.

The existential framework is not meant as a taxonomy of universal truths, but it offers a tool to consider human experience (Yalom, 1980). In this section I have briefly explored some of my findings from this study through the lens of existential perspectives which go some way towards further illuminating the key findings, such as aloneness, and vulnerability. While the climate crisis is existential in nature, threats to existence are as old as human history, ranging from natural disasters to individual threats to life. As such, although existential perspectives can offer some guidance for the findings and implications of this study, in the next section I will consider Compassion Theory to further develop the explanatory framework for these findings in relation to psychological theory.

4.4.2 Compassion Theory

While existentialism provides a framework for understanding the psychological weight of the climate crisis, particularly the themes of aloneness, vulnerability, and existential anxiety, compassion theory offers an additional lens through which to examine participants' experiences. Compassion theory, particularly as developed within psychological research (Gilbert, 2009, 2020), emphasises the role of self-compassion and compassion for others in navigating distress, fostering resilience, and promoting adaptive responses to suffering. In the context of this study, compassion theory can illuminate the ways in which talking therapists engage with their own climate-related distress, support clients facing similar anxieties, and grapple with the ethical and professional implications of their role in a rapidly changing world.

Compassion can be broadly understood as a sensitivity to suffering, coupled with a commitment to alleviate and prevent it (Gilbert, 2009). It involves an awareness of distress, an ability to tolerate emotional discomfort, and a motivation to respond in a caring and constructive manner. In this study, participants described an emotional oscillation between deep engagement with the climate crisis and a necessary withdrawal from its overwhelming reality. This pattern aligns with research on compassion fatigue and empathic distress (Singer & Klimecki, 2014), which suggests that persistent exposure to suffering, whether personal, relational, or global, can lead to emotional exhaustion and avoidance behaviours. Gilbert (2014) highlights that compassionate engagement must be balanced with self-care to prevent burnout, a key consideration in the experience of talking therapists navigating climate distress.

Participants' experiences of aloneness and disconnection can also be examined through the lens of compassion theory. Research suggests that self-compassion, which is a construct encompassing self-kindness, mindfulness, and common humanity, can help mitigate feelings of isolation and shame (Neff, 2011). When individuals recognise that their distress is part of a shared human experience rather than a personal failing, they are more likely to engage in adaptive coping strategies rather than retreat into avoidance, guilt, or self-criticism. In this study, some participants described feelings of guilt regarding their perceived lack of action in response to the climate crisis, echoing the moral emotions of shame and guilt explored in climate psychology literature (Pihkala, 2022). However, other participants demonstrated an ability to hold their distress with compassion, recognising their personal limitations and the systemic nature of the climate crisis.

Furthermore, the experience of vulnerability in the face of existential threat, as described by participants, can be understood through the evolutionary model of compassion. Gilbert (2017)

suggests that humans have evolved three affect regulation systems: the threat system (focused on detecting danger), the drive system (focused on achievement and motivation), and the soothing system (focused on connection and safety). In the context of the climate crisis, participants' heightened awareness of ecological destruction and perceived hopelessness may be linked to an overactivation of the threat system. Compassion-based interventions, such as Compassion-Focused Therapy (CFT), emphasise the importance of developing the soothe system to counteract excessive threat activation, promoting psychological resilience and a sense of agency in the face of global crises (Kirby et al., 2017). Participants' recognition of their need to oscillate between engagement and withdrawal could be interpreted as an intuitive attempt to regulate these competing emotional systems, seeking moments of restoration before re-engaging with the reality of the crisis.

As such, compassion theory offers an important framework for understanding the participants' experiences as found in this study, considering the emotional strain and professional adaptation to the climate crisis. It provides insights into how talking therapists experience the psychological challenges of climate awareness while maintaining their emotional well-being. As this study suggests, self-compassion, emotional regulation, and collective compassion may be key mechanisms in supporting therapists as they navigate the existential and ethical dimensions of their work in an era of environmental crisis.

4.5 Application of findings using ACT and Psychological Flexibility

The findings of this study suggest that the experience of the climate crisis is a balancing act between being able to connect with our human emotional experiences of aloneness and the vulnerability of existential threat, versus finding ways to cope with the strain and adapt to the

climate crisis. Indeed, fostering adaptive behaviours towards the climate crisis is essential, but it cannot be done if the human emotional responses are not also recognised. Studies have already highlighted that individuals will be less likely to engage with climate action and adaptation if their wellbeing and emotional responses become overwhelming (Stanley et al., 2021; Geiger et al., 2021). Psychological flexibility is a key therapeutic process in ACT, defined as the tendency to respond to difficult situations in ways that facilitate values driven behaviour, recognising this fine balance between acceptance of what is (i.e. internal struggle) and being guided by our values to act mindfully (Doorley et al., 2020). As such, I have sought to offer a response to the findings from this study alongside the framework of ACT.

ACT recognises the concept that life is inherently a struggle, and the human brain has evolved in such a way that psychological suffering is inevitable (Hayes et al., 2011). This contrasts with mainstream therapeutic models that suggest psychological health is equated to the absence of psychological pain (Boorman et al., 2023). ACT suggests that it is *how* we engage with this internal psychological struggle that impacts on our day-to-day experiences (Harris, 2019). Indeed, ACT assumes that psychological suffering inevitably occurs when difficult internal experiences become the dominant motivation of behaviour (Hayes et al., 2011). Unlike other behavioural and cognitive approaches that seek to alter the frequency or form of thoughts and feelings, ACT emphasises the relationship an individual has with these distressing internal experiences and instead encourages psychological flexibility (Boorman et al., 2023). In this study, the participants sense of the climate crisis highlights both how psychologically challenging it can feel to experience this existential threat, while also wanting to be more engaged with it.

ACT's focus on values rather than the pursuit of goals is significant in exploring these findings; pursuing goals has the potential to lead to more distress, for example in the context of this study, through feeling shame at not doing more, helpless at one's inability to act, or the frustration felt at the lack of wider engagement of others both personally and professionally. Therefore, psychological flexibility and the concept of values offers an alternative that supports individuals to accept these struggles as part of the process, while continuing to commit to taking values-based-action. In this way, psychological flexibility can be particularly useful to guide us through experiences of the climate crisis, accepting the inherent struggle whilst working towards what matters.

There are six core therapeutic processes that contribute to psychological flexibility; acceptance, defusion, present moment contact, self as context, values, and committed action (Hayes et al., 2011), creating what is known as the ACT Hexaflex (Harris, 2019). Together, these six core processes work to increase psychological flexibility, supporting individuals to navigate life challenges with greater resilience and adaptability.

The first of these six concepts is *acceptance*, which is when individuals actively accept the experiences of uncomfortable feelings and thoughts, rather than judging or avoiding them, enabling individuals to learn to coexist with these challenging internal experiences. This is closely linked to the second concept of *defusion*, which involves learning how to notice our thinking patterns without being dominated by them, identifying the impact they have on our behaviour. In the context of this study, the findings indicate how deeply emotional and vulnerable participants felt, consequently through recognising and accepting these experiences as part of the human condition, rather than something to avoid, talking therapists can be supported through this.

Present moment contact refers to the focus on the here-and-now, fostering mindfulness and supporting the individual to connect with their internal experiences. This is closely connected to the fourth concept of *self as context*, which encourages individuals to see themselves more broadly than simply their thoughts and feelings, providing them a sense of self that allows them to observe their internal processing without getting caught up in it. The findings from this study emphasise the strain of climate awareness, highlighting the importance of being open and present to internal experiences. Holding this present moment awareness supports acceptance of the ebb and flow of engagement and the shedding of shame at not doing more, instead encouraging a more compassionate experience. The final two concepts are focused on activation strategies; *values* encourage individuals to identify what matters to them, guiding their behaviours, while *committed action* involves engaging in behaviour that aligns with one's values, even if there are hurdles. Participants shared their experiences of adaptation, and these concepts encourage alignment with values that can support their process of adapting and doing what matters.

This study has shown the uncomfortable and painful emotions that engagement with the climate crisis may evoke. From an ACT perspective, talking therapists should remain open and accepting of the difficult internal experiences whilst defusing negative thinking patterns and retaining a mindful present moment awareness. Individuals and the governing bodies of the talking therapist professions need to clarify their core values in relation to the climate crisis. Training should be provided to support individuals to engage with these experiences, enabling both individual and collective committed actions**.** As such, ACT and the concept of psychological flexibility offers a framework for supporting talking therapists as they navigate their experiences with the climate crisis. Below, Table.4-1. offers a summary of these concepts, their definitions, and their implications for this study.

Table.4-1.

Summary of Six Key Concepts in ACT and their Implications for this Study (Hayes et al., 2011).

ACT concept	Definition	Implication for this study
Acceptance	Being open to accept and separate thoughts from feelings	Developing self-awareness by normalising and naming the internal struggle, that comes with the experience of climate crisis
Defusion	Ability to experience unwanted thoughts and feelings, and allowing them to pass without fusing to them	Therapists should have space to connect and explore their thoughts and feelings in relation to the climate crisis
Present moment contact	Pay attention to present moment experience with openness and curiosity	Interventions for therapists should include an element of mindfulness training that helps recognise fusion to negative thoughts of the climate crisis
Self as context	Capacity to maintain a balanced perspective from which to observe difficult thoughts and feelings	Training to develop concept of self as context, supporting therapists in the moment when climate issues raised in therapy room
Values	Identifying and knowing what matters; creating vitality in one's life	Therapists should clarify their values, supported by broader disciplinary level clarification of values, and proposal of meaningful position statements.
Committed Action	Behaviour that moves us closer to connection with one's values	Encouragement to consider themselves more broadly within this phenomenon, as both professionals and individuals. Guidance should be offered by professional bodies as to how to engage with this professionally

4.6 Implications for Counselling Psychology

So far, the findings in this study have been grounded within relevant literature and highlight the complexity of experience of the climate crisis for talking therapists. The findings have emphasised the necessity for talking therapists to consider the profound personal and social dimensions of this experience for their own self-awareness and when working with clients impacted by climate concerns. Further, the findings have been considered in relation to the psychological theories of Existentialism and ACT, helping to illuminate how the findings can inform the talking therapy professions. As such, it is hoped that this study might influence the training and practice of counselling psychologists more specifically. This section highlights the implications of this research for the field of counselling psychology (CoP). Table.4-2. offers an overview of the implications for counselling psychology that have arisen from this study, and these will be considered in more detail below.

Table.4-2.

Summary of the implications of this study for Counselling Psychology

Implication	Recommendation	Level of intervention
Professional Training and Development	Provide training about climate crisis and relevant issues for qualified CoPs	BPS Divisional DCoP
	Incorporate training within accredited DPsych programs	BPS accreditation standards
Developing Self-awareness and Reflection	Reflective practice and conversations about climate crisis experiences	BPS Divisional CoP DPsych Courses Individuals

	Reflective practice considering role of psychology in climate crisis	BPS Divisional CoP DPsych Courses Individuals
	Signposting to existing reflective groups, for example climate cafes or work that reconnects	BPS Divisional CoP DPsych courses
Developing Collective Responsibility	Revise BPS standards to review values in relation to climate crisis	BPS
	CoP working group aimed at offering guidance for climate crisis	BPS Divisional CoP
	Highlight the variety of ways CoPs can engage professionally with the climate crisis	BPS Divisional CoP
	Creation of centralised divisional webpages to signpost existing multidisciplinary action and resources i.e. CPA, WTR, XR Psychologists, CoP climate book club	BPS BPS Divisional CoP

4.6.1 Professional Training and Development

One of the primary implications is the necessity for more comprehensive training that specifically addresses climate issues. Currently, there is limited training about the climate crisis within continuing professional development (CPD) or Counselling Psychology programs, and as such, it's essential that training is provided. Training that focuses on both the context and practical elements of experiencing and working with climate issues would help counselling psychologists to develop their skills and competencies to support clients while navigating their own emotional responses. This training would also encourage counselling psychologists and trainees to be more engaged with the issue. Not only would it facilitate learning about the origins and social/historical/political contexts of the climate crisis, but it could also support counselling psychologists to begin to explore their own personal and professional experiences of it.

The training should incorporate key elements of the climate crisis, including its background, and the historical and social context for the current issues associated with it. It would also be important

to discuss the mental health implications of it, and how it might be observed in practice by counselling psychologists i.e. introducing concepts such as eco-anxiety and ecological grief while ensuring this remains non-pathologising. The key concepts of ACT should be considered in relation to this training as explored above, and common difficult thoughts and emotions should be identified and normalised, as well as integration of mindfulness training to stay present in the face of potential emotional responses felt by those attending the training. Consolidation of personal and professional values could also form part of this training, recognising the variety of ways that individuals can engage with the climate crisis, informed by their personal experiences and values.

4.6.2 Developing Self-awareness and Reflection

The findings from this study emphasise the need for talking therapists to engage deeply with their own emotional experiences of the climate crisis. This is a core part of training in counselling psychology; developing self-awareness aids recognition of not only how our emotional responses can impact on the client, but also vice versa. The need for counselling psychologists to be self-aware is an ethical requirement (BPS, 2021), yet there has been very little emphasis on developing this in the context of the climate crisis within training programs or divisionally.

As the climate crisis becomes more visible and individuals become more conscious of the threat from the climate crisis, the findings from this study highlight the need for an ongoing engagement and exploration of these feelings. As emotions such as grief, fear, and helplessness evolve and deepen, possibly coming into the therapy room, so too must counselling psychologists evolve alongside these experiences, remaining mindful of their personal emotional experiences. When it comes to the climate crisis these findings support the existing arguments that talking therapists should ensure they are aware of their own feelings to better support their clients (Bednarek, 2019: Hickman, 2020). Without such personal exploration, there is a risk of emotional overwhelm and

detachment, which can make it harder to engage meaningfully with the topic in the therapy room (Bednarek, 2019).

This is something that can be offered within counselling psychology training, integrating reflective conversations that encourage counselling psychologists to consider their own climate concerns and feelings. Or indeed, through signposting to existing spaces that offer reflective practice. Several groups with this intention have been set up, such as the Climate Psychology Alliance (CPA) offering climate cafes as a space to share, and these are becoming popular, offering an opportunity to also mitigate feelings of isolation. The most established ecopsychology group that seeks to support members towards feeling empowered enough to act, are the Work That Reconnects (WTR) groups. Created by Joanna Macy over forty years ago, they have worked to support participants to hold space for their profound emotional experiences in relation to the climate crisis and connect with others who are in the same position (Macy, 2020). There are several stages to the group process, including encouragement to connect to the more painful emotional experiences, and sitting with them in order to move through those responses towards action, and engaging authentically with the climate crisis (Macy & Brown, 2014). Informal feedback suggests that WTR groups are an overwhelmingly positive experience for participants, primarily associated with not feeling alone in their experiences of distress, and their experiences being validated by sharing with others (Johnstone, 2019).

4.6.3 Developing Collective Responsibility

The research highlights participants' frustrations with the lack of collective action and guidance from professional bodies. For counselling psychology, this implies a need to establish a more unified stance on climate issues and promote collective responsibility across the profession. The BPS should work towards creating clear guidelines and position statements on how practitioners can address climate issues in their practice. This collective approach would not only provide a

framework for individual counselling psychologists but also signal a commitment from the profession to engage meaningfully with climate issues. Research has indicated that social connection and a sense of community, solidarity, and hope are protective factors against the negative impacts of the climate crisis (Howard, 2022; Ojala et al, 2021). As such, developing this within the profession would support counselling psychologists to feel supported and contained.

Participants' reflections on the ethical duty of the profession to engage with climate issues resonates with growing calls for psychology to be more proactive (Rhodes & Dunk, 2023; Barnes et al., 2022). As such, a review of the BPS standards to include relevant ethical considerations and re-evaluation of values in relation to the climate crisis would be necessary for this. To consider these values and the role of counselling psychology, it is essential that the BPS Division of Counselling Psychology actively engages with this and can offer clear direction as to their position on this issue. The development of a working group within counselling psychology could support the progression and engagement of these climate conversations within the division. Although it is indicated that this already exists, I have struggled to contact this group to find out more information. As such, it seems that there is space for the development of such a group.

4.7 Quality Evaluation: Strengths, limitations and suggestions for further research

My aim in this study has been to explore how U.K. talking therapists experience the climate crisis both personally and professionally. More broadly, the objective has been to contribute to the growing research on this phenomenon, to understand the needs of talking therapists as individuals who are simultaneously experiencing this phenomenon while working therapeutically with individuals doing the same, and to answer the call for psychology to take more of a role in this issue (APA, 2022; Chin et al, 2022). I suggest that the existential threat posed by the climate crisis means that talking therapists must embrace their humanness, their personal reactions and

experiences, alongside their professional engagement. I also suggest that the psychological professional bodies have a responsibility to unite, and work together both between and across divisions, to offer guidance for their practitioners, as well as offering leadership to direct resources and consider how to engage sustainably with climate action. I have reflected on any ethical issues of recruitment and interviewing, and I have attempted to share participant experiences respectfully, remaining as close as possible to their accounts. I have actively engaged with reflexivity to work through impasses and recognise my own impact on the study as the researcher and someone who works clinically with individuals who have raised climate concerns in the therapeutic space.

Yet there are some considerations to be made that perhaps influenced the research. This study was conducted in the aftermath of COVID-19 lockdowns, and the resulting instability that arose from that period. It is worth noting how this might have influenced participants experiences, perhaps intensifying the experience of vulnerability and isolation. All participants mentioned COVID-19 in relation to the climate crisis; while some felt it gave them more time to acknowledge and engage with climate issues, others recognised that the government handling of covid signified a lack of ability to handle climate issues. Thus, the sense of vulnerability and helplessness might have been exacerbated through this context.

This study is limited in the lack of ethnic, cultural, and racial diversity amongst recruited participants. It would have been preferable to explore experiences that reflect a broader demographic, but due to the time-limited process of recruitment, as well as the issues of recruitment already discussed in the methodology chapter, I was unable to recruit a more diverse sample. In a recorded interview, Nature Allied Psychotherapist Beth Collier describes the constant

racial oppression faced by black people in the U.K. who enter rural spaces, with the assumption that they are there to commit crime. This not only serves to limit their relationship with nature, but also their inclusion in conversations relating to the natural world (Wild in the City, 2024). In this context, the interrelation between the climate crisis and racism is essential to acknowledge, and colonisation has played a key role in contributing to the climate crisis, for example through the global overexploitation of resources to fuel European and United States industrialisation (Abimbola et al., 2021). So far, most research into experiences of climate change have been predominantly from a white and Western demographic (Ray, 2021). Yet, the climate crisis is a phenomenon that will not discriminate based on culture, race, or ethnicity, and the lack of different voices in this study emphasises the urgent need to recruit a more diverse sample to allow for a broader representation of experiences; future research should ensure this limitation is addressed.

4.7.1 Methodological Evaluation

The incorporation of object elicitation as part of my research design was a strength for various reasons. Primarily it facilitated participants engagement with the topic before interview, allowing them time and space to frame the phenomenon themselves (Willig, 2013). I also believe that participants use of the object to give them something concrete off which to base their reflections deepened our conversations. The inclusion of an object fostered a richness to the discussion that we either might not have got to without it, or that might have taken some time to get to.

Yet, it's also worth noting the possible limitations of using object elicitation, which largely involves the question of burden. While a strength has been the engagement of participants prior to interview, this might also be a limitation. In consideration of the recruitment issues, I wondered how this invitation was received by those who might be interested in taking part, but did not want the extra task of finding an object. Several participants emailed specifically to question their objects, perhaps reflecting a self-consciousness of sharing something that felt intimate in nature.

Although ultimately the use of object elicitation was a methodological strength, it is worth acknowledging how the added layer of forethought and the possible burden of bringing an object might have influenced participant engagement.

Further adding to the methodological strengths, this study met the four quality markers for IPA analysis, and I feel able to justify how I met the criteria for these (Nizza et al, 2022). These four qualities are expanded upon below:

1) Constructing a compelling, unfolding narrative

I have attempted to tell a story through my findings, and include a sense of progression throughout the narrative, that conveys the hermeneutic circle connecting the parts with the whole, as is typical in IPA (Nizza et al, 2022). I hope that this is evident within and across themes; within themes and subthemes, I have organised the findings to alternate between participant's quotes, alongside my analytic interpretation of these. My aim has been to progress the story with each subsequent quote, adding to the narrative and taking the analysis a step further. Across themes, I have attempted to achieve a sense of coherence by ensuring that each theme contributes to the overall findings and emphasising their interconnected nature.

2) Developing a vigorous experiential and/or existential account

IPA encourages contemplation in order to make sense of a phenomenon, invariably, this will be something that matters to the participant and reflects their lived experience of this phenomenon. The climate crisis is an existential threat for all participants, and I hope that I have been able to convey how they have made meaning around this. The aim of the study has been to understand the significance of the climate crisis within participants' clinical practice, but given the existential

significance of the topic, much of what they shared were personal reflections about how they make sense of this. Consequently, the question has shifted at the will of the data, to include the personal nature of this experience. I hope that I have done them justice through the development of experiential themes that reflect both the personal and professional significance of the climate crisis.

3) Close analytic reading of participants' words

This refers to the commitment researchers' make in IPA to access idiographic depth, which is achieved through close analytic reading and interpretation of participant quotes. I have attempted to achieve this by thoroughly engaging with the participant transcript, and the hermeneutic process, to reveal the deeper significance of the particular relationship the participants have with the experience. I hope the close reading of the quotes can be evidenced through communication of my interpretation and moving between their idiographic language and the knowledge displayed in the wider transcript.

4) Attending to convergence and divergence

IPA intends to highlight the uniqueness of participant experience, as well as illustrating the patterns across experience, through the focus on similarities and differences of experience. This enables demonstration of representation, variability and prevalence within the findings (Nizza et al, 2022). Through noticing convergence and divergence of experience, the aim is to demonstrate the broader qualities that participants share, while remaining close to the unique distinguishing characteristics of individual participant experience. I have intended to consider convergence and divergence of experience within participant quotes both in the context of their wider personal narrative, as well as at times, in the context of the broader group experience.

4.6.2 Further research

There are relatively few qualitative studies specifically exploring talking therapist experience of the climate crisis (Silva & Coburn, 2023), yet several reflective pieces have been written that highlight the desire for these experiences to be heard (Li et al., 2022; Samuel et al., 2022). As such, the comparison and transferability of the findings from this study are limited (Willig, 2013). Further research within counselling psychology could contribute to our understanding of talking therapist experiences. As discussed above, a limitation of this study was the lack of diversity, as such, further research in this area should prioritise a diverse sampling to ensure a broader representation of voices are included in dialogue of this issue.

This study did not consider client experiences of bringing climate concerns to therapy or how they might have felt throughout their therapeutic interactions about the climate crisis. To better understand talking therapist experiences, it might also be helpful to consider the dynamics within therapy and explore both client and therapist experiences to understand what this is like for both practitioner and client.

4.8 Methodological Reflexivity

I have discussed the value that IPA places on the role of the researcher, embracing this as part of the research. As such, throughout this study I have actively recognised my role as the researcher and endeavoured to keep a journal to ensure that this engagement has remained central to me. Although this has not always been an easy process, this reflexivity has been essential to move through periods of impasse. As such, I recognise that there are a number of ways that I have shaped this research.

Despite my reflexivity, and efforts to recognise and bracket my assumptions, interests, and experiences, they might have contributed to a bias when developing this study. For example, my role as both researcher and counselling psychology trainee was something I was conscious of when interviewing participants. I found myself wanting to connect with my participants and share in their experience. Recognising this early on was essential and it supported me to put my researcher hat on when conducting interviews, allowing myself to be more curious and holding boundaries. For example, several participants asked why I was engaged with this project and were curious about my motivation and experience. I noticed my desire to jump in and share these things with them, but instead recognised that this came from a desire to connect and share my interest for the project with individuals who were equally as interested. As such, I recognised the need for boundaries, and if this happened, I agreed to discuss my interests after the interview.

Similarly, I'm aware that my decision to hold the interviews online might have impacted on the research process. For example, some interviews had moments of internet disconnection, and I wonder how that might have influenced the flow of our discussions. Equally, perhaps my engagement with the participants answers, both verbal and non-verbal, encouraged or discouraged participants from following their own thread. My hope is that whilst this was possible, it was kept to a minimum, and focusing the analysis on participant accounts, their tone and non-verbal communication, alongside my engagement with this, has ensured a thorough analysis.

As I reach the end of this research, I am aware of how it has impacted me, both personally and professionally. I find myself in a different position from where I began; while I still do not identify as an activist, I feel more confident engaging with climate issues and less alone in my concerns. Hearing participants' reflections on their own struggles with isolation and emotional burden has

supported some of my own experiences since I began this project, and I have come to appreciate the value of collective dialogue in processing the enormity of the crisis.

Professionally, this research has deepened my understanding of the importance of psychology within these societal issues. Not only is there value in psychology supporting individuals' as they process their climate related distress, but also in shaping the broader response to the crisis. I have become more aware of the responsibility and power held by psychological professions to guide discussions on these important topics, rather than focusing solely on individual responsibilities. Yet I still struggle with the political undertones of this topic and how to navigate these more broadly as a professional. Engaging with this topic has not resolved these tensions, but it has given me more confidence to explore them, holding space for this complexity rather than avoiding difficult conversations. As I move forward, I am committed to continuing to develop this and understand how psychology can play a more integral role that ensures distress about the climate is not pathologised but rather situated within the larger social and political realities.

4.9 Conclusion

This study has explored talking therapist experiences of the climate crisis. It used IPA in order to gain unique and in-depth insights into the individual experiences of six participants. The findings from this highlight that experiences are complex and personal, involving both existential themes of aloneness and vulnerability to such a threat, versus finding ways to cope with the strain and adapt to the climate crisis professionally.

This research has highlighted several important implications for counselling psychology training and practice, which are particularly urgent given the climate crisis is evolving and increasingly impacting on individuals' mental health and wellbeing. Given that counselling psychology's

commitment to social justice is well established (Winter, 2023), it seems highly necessary that the profession should be more active and engaged with these issues that will largely affect the most vulnerable members of society. This study emphasises the need for counselling psychologists, both individually and collectively, to develop their self-awareness, skills, and knowledge of the climate crisis, emphasising the power and responsibility we hold as psychology professionals to engage with these vital issues at a critical time.

A key message from this research is the dual role that counselling psychologists hold, not only supporting individuals through their personal distress in relation to the climate crisis but also in shaping the psychological response that can acknowledge the systemic dimensions of this issue. The climate crisis is not simply an individual psychological burden to cope with but a socio-political reality that requires the psychology professions to take a leading role in developing collective, therapeutic, and advocacy-based responses. Without this, there is a risk that individuals will continue to feel alone with their distress. Now, more than ever, counselling psychology should not only support but lead, offering both the psychological tools and the professional leadership needed to guide a more collective response.

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Appendices

Appendix A - Ethical Approval

Dear Poppy

Reference: ETH2122-0309

Project title: How do U.K. Counselling Psychologists experience the Climate Crisis within their clinical practice?

Start date: 5 Apr 2022

End date: 30 Sep 2023

I am writing to you to confirm that the research proposal detailed above has been granted formal approval from the Psychology low risk review. The Committee's response is based on the protocol described in the application form and supporting documentation. Approval has been given for the submitted application only and the research must be conducted accordingly. You are now free to start recruitment.

The approval was given with the following conditions:

- ...
- ...
- ...

Please ensure that you are familiar with City's Framework for Good Practice in Research and any appropriate Departmental/School guidelines, as well as applicable external relevant policies.

Please note the following:

Project amendments/extension

You will need to submit an amendment or request an extension if you wish to make any of the following changes to your research project:

- Change or add a new category of participants;
- Change or add researchers involved in the project, including PI and supervisor;
- Change to the sponsorship/collaboration;
- Add a new or change a territory for international projects;
- Change the procedures undertaken by participants, including any change relating to the safety or physical or mental integrity of research participants, or to the risk/benefit assessment for the project or collecting additional types of data from research participants;
- Change the design and/or methodology of the study, including changing or adding a new research method and/or research instrument;

- Change project documentation such as protocol, participant information sheets, consent forms, questionnaires, letters of invitation, information sheets for relatives or carers;
- Change to the insurance or indemnity arrangements for the project;
- Change the end date of the project.

Adverse events or untoward incidents

You will need to submit an Adverse Events or Untoward Incidents report in the event of any of the following:

a) Adverse events

b) Breaches of confidentiality

c) Safeguarding issues relating to children or vulnerable adults

d) Incidents that affect the personal safety of a participant or researcher

Issues a) and b) should be reported as soon as possible and no later than five days after the event. Issues c) and d) should be reported immediately. Where appropriate, the researcher should also report adverse events to other relevant institutions, such as the police or social services.

Should you have any further queries relating to this matter, please do not hesitate to contact me. On behalf of the Psychology low risk review, I do hope that the project meets with success.

Kind regards

[redacted]

Psychology low risk review

City, University of London

Appendix B – Interview Schedule

Prior to interview –

1. Please bring to the interview an object, which could be anything including photos, that makes you think of climate change, and your experience of it.

Introductory question –

1. What prompted you to take part in this study?

Personal experience of climate change -

1. Can you share your photo/object with me, and tell me about why you chose it, and what it represents to you?
    a. Is there anything else you'd like to share?

2. Could you tell me a little about what you know, if anything, about climate change?
    a. Do you remember first becoming aware of climate change and any thoughts or feelings that you had about it then compared to now?

Experiences of working with climate distress in clinical practice –

3. Can you tell me about your experience of working with clients experiencing climate distress?

Prompts -

a) What stands out the most for you from these experiences?
b) What was being said?
c) What did you notice about your own process?
d) How did you process in between sessions?
e) What stayed with you afterwards?
f) What impact did this have both personally and professionally? What did it bring up for you?
g) Reflecting, what was going on for your clients in those moments, and how did you experience transference?
h) What do you make of that here with me now?

Broader professional impact –

4. How do you as a practicing psychologist view yourself within the context of the climate crisis?

5. How do you think your training as a psychologist has affected your experience of the climate crisis, if at all?

6. Finally, is there anything that hasn't come up so far today, that you would like to share to help me understand how you make sense of the climate crisis?

Appendix C – Informed Consent

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INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Poppy Gould – Ethics reference number ETH2122-0309

How do practitioner psychologists, psychotherapists and counsellors in the U.K. experience the climate crisis within their clinical practice?

		Please tick or initial box
1	I confirm that I have read and understood the participant information dated November 2022 V.9 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 from the study up to the anonymisation of my data, which will occur two weeks after the interview.	
4.	I agree to the interview being audio recorded.	
5.	I agree that anonymised direct quotes can be used in the publication and dissemination of this research.	
6.	I agree that my object can be shared anonymously in the publication and dissemination of this research and agree that a photograph of it can be taken.	
7.	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).	
8.	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.	
9.	I agree to take part in the above study.	

Name of Participant	Signature	Date
Name of Researcher	Signature	Date

When completed, 1 copy for participant; 1 copy for researcher file.

Appendix D – Participant Information Document

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PARTICIPANT INFORMATION DOCUMENT

Ethics reference number ETH2122-0309, November 2022 v.9

Study title – How do practitioner psychologists, psychotherapists, and counsellors in the U.K. experience the climate crisis within clinical practice?

Poppy Gould - Research student, Doctorate of Counselling Psychology

We 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. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

What is the purpose of the study?

The aim of my research is to explore the experiences of mental health professionals who have worked therapeutically with clients experiencing some form of climate distress. The climate crisis is an evolving issue recognised as one of the biggest threats to mental health over the coming century. My research aims to provide further insight into how the climate crisis is being experienced by you.

This research is being undertaken as part of the Professional Doctorate of Counselling Psychology. It forms part of the student research and will be carried out between 2021 and 2023.

Who can take part in this study?

This study is seeking HCPC/BACP/UKCP qualified, clinically active, U.K. based, practitioner psychologists, psychotherapists, or counsellors, who have experience of working with one or more of the following:

- Clients bringing climate distress as a main presenting issue
- Clients where climate distress has emerged as a significant part of the work
- Clients who bring an acute experience or episode of climate distress

Choosing to take part in this study will not reflect on your practice or professionalism. It is a confidential study.

Do I have to take part?

Participation in the project is voluntary, and you can choose not to participate. If initially you do want to take part, but later change your mind, you can withdraw without being penalised or disadvantaged in any way.

If you do decide to take part, you will be asked to sign a consent form. It is important to note - once data has been transcribed (approximately 2 weeks after interview) participants will no longer be able to withdraw from the research. If you do choose to withdraw before this point, then your data will be destroyed.

What will happen if I take part?

Taking part will involve engaging in an interview with the researcher. This can be conducted at a time convenient for you and will be via Zoom. Prior to the interview, you will be asked to choose an object related to climate change (which could be anything, including photos), and then discuss this object as part of the interview.

The interview will last no more than 60 minutes. It will be audio recorded, and then transcribed by the researcher two weeks later. At that point all your personal information will be removed from the transcription, and the transcript will become anonymised. Audio recordings will be deleted once transcribed. Transcriptions, consent forms and contact information (if you request a follow up), will all be stored separately from each other to ensure anonymity.

The interview transcript will then be analysed with the aim of exploring your unique experiences of climate change.

As part of the research some direct quotes may be used anonymously in the write up.

As a participant, you will be required to read the consent form, and if you agree to it, I will type your name electronically into it at the start of the interview, before interviewing can take place. This will be stored securely, and separately from both the audio recording and the transcription.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

It is anticipated that the only risk might be that climate change can be an emotive topic, and it could cause distress when discussing it. Breaks can be had at any point, and if the interview becomes too uncomfortable, it can be ended. Please ask any questions beforehand to ensure you feel comfortable taking part.

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 person at City who will have access to your identifiable information will be Poppy Gould. City will keep the data collected from this study until the researcher graduates from the university (September 2023).

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 of this research will be written up for a doctoral thesis, and your anonymity will be maintained throughout. If you would like to receive a summary of key findings, please let the researcher know, and your contact details will be kept securely, and separately, from the data collected.

This study could also be published, and this would also be made available to you at your request.

Who has reviewed the study?

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

What if there's a problem?

If you have any problems, concerns or questions about this study, you should ask to speak to 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 'How do Counselling Psychologists experience climate change within clinical practice'.

You can also write to the Secretary at:

[redacted]

Insurance

City holds insurance policies which apply to this study. If you feel you have been harmed or injured by taking part in this study, you may be eligible to claim compensation. This does not affect your legal rights to seek compensation. If you are harmed due to someone's negligence, then you may have grounds for legal action.

Further information and contact details

Poppy Gould (Student researcher)

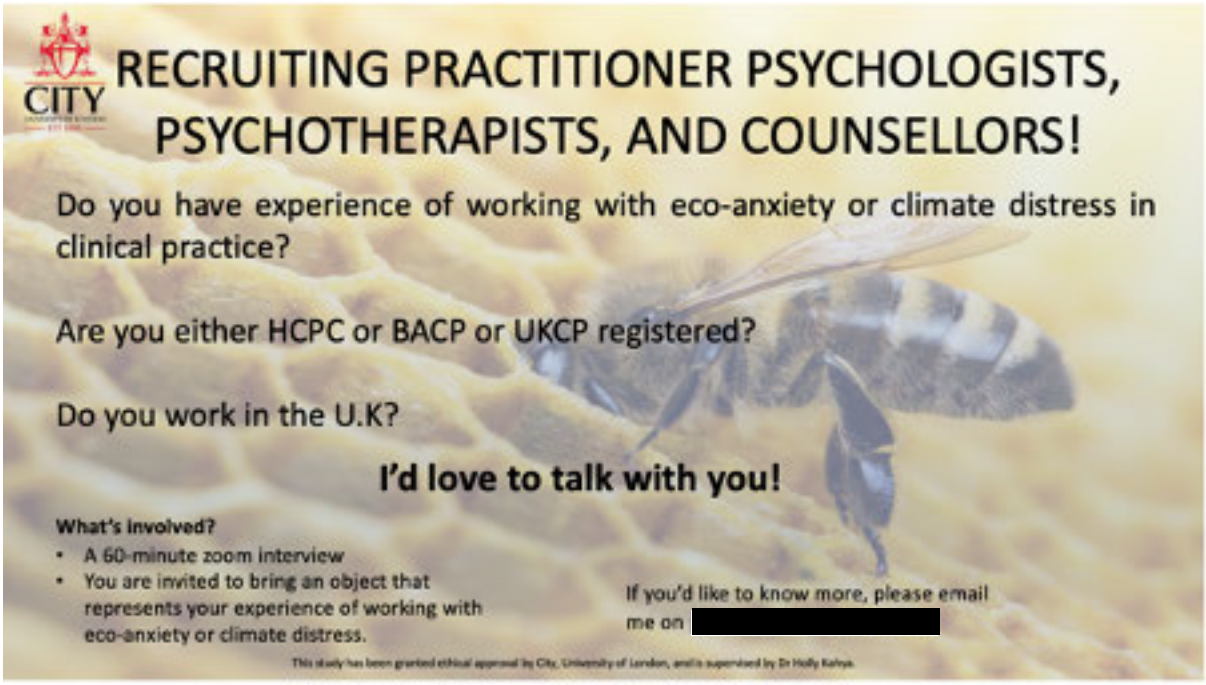
[redacted]

Dr. Holly Kahya (Supervisor)

[redacted]

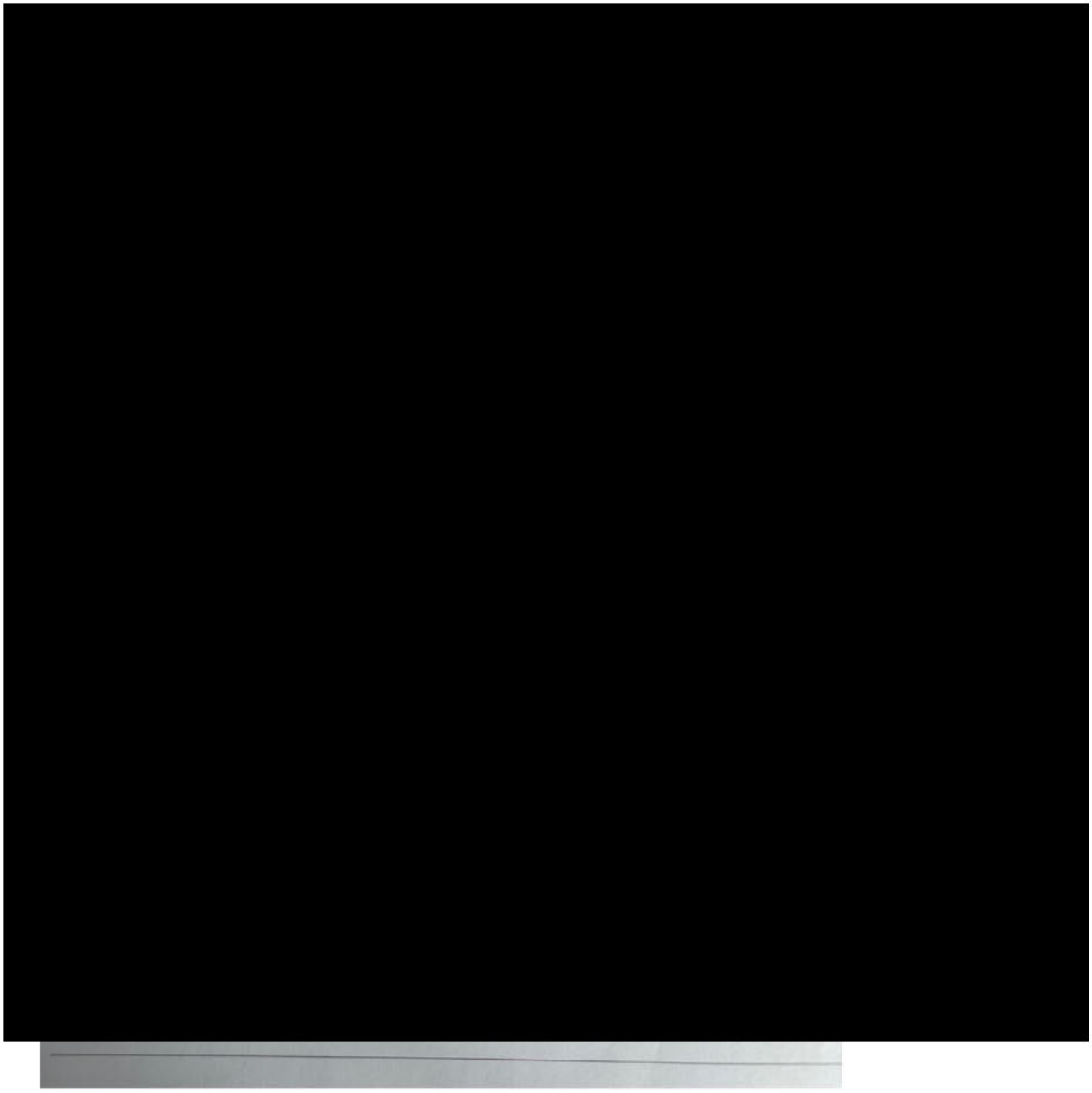
Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

Appendix E – Recruitment Flyer



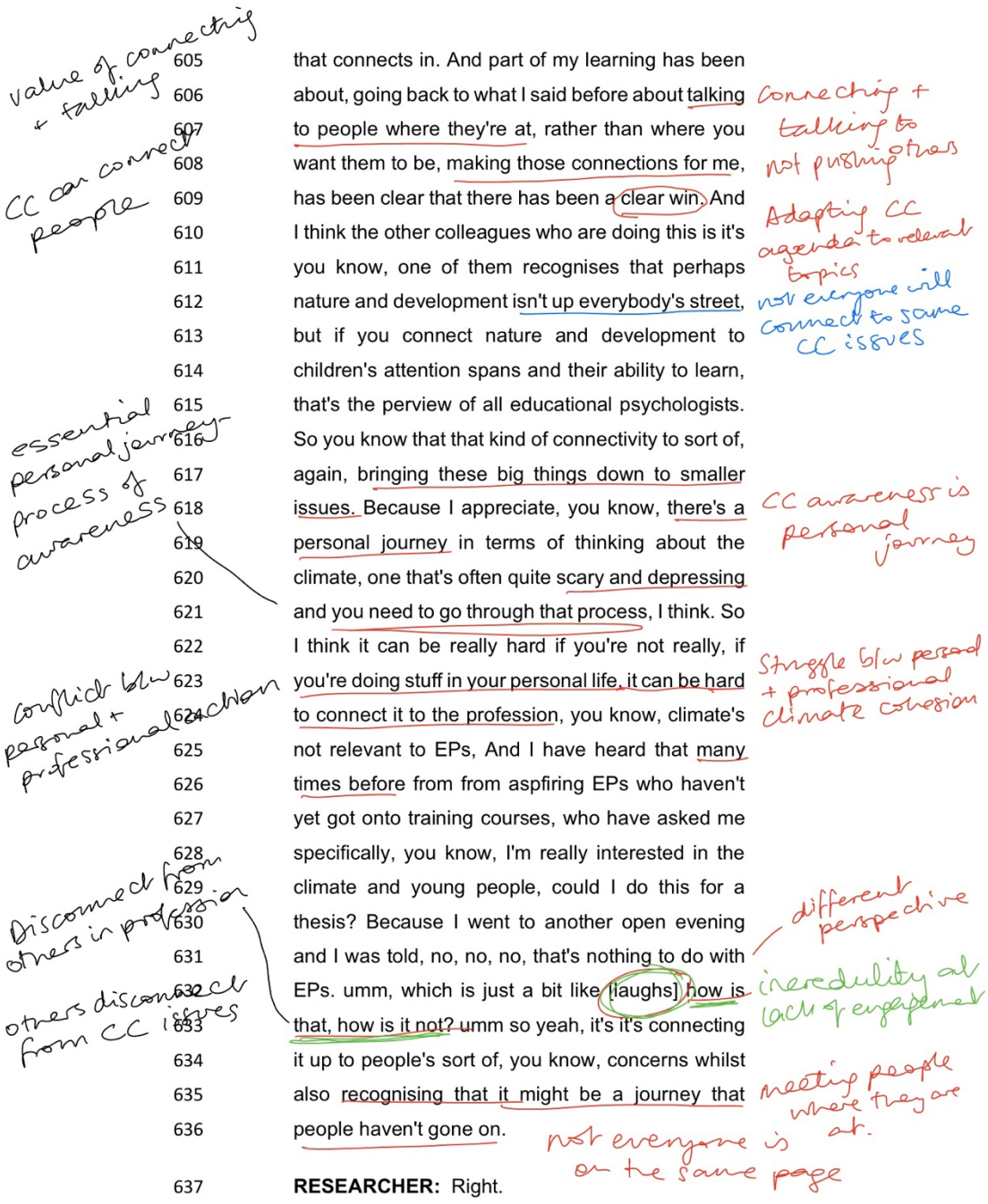
Appendix F – Summary of Transcript

Example of informal summary of transcript for Hazel:



Appendix G – Example of Exploratory Noting

Exploratory noting on transcript, Heath:



Heath: And kind of recognising that has has been really important.

RESEARCHER: Yeah. So there's something there about it needs to almost be this personal journey first before it can be engaged professionally. Is that kind of what you…. [mean]?

Heath: Yeah, it is what I mean. But I just don't think, my experience in the different teams that I've worked in, and you know, [laughing] I sound really professionally negative… there's always this strong impetus to like do stuff to other people. So I used to work in a local authority, I'm going to use the example of EDI, Equality, Diversity and inclusion post George Floyd and thinking about the diversity of the profession, umm in the local authority i used to work for umm, our [l.a.] Suddenly set up an only working group which I wanted to be part of. I, you know. Yeah. And EDI in it's broadest sense, so I'm gay. I have, you know, I used to be an LGBT youth worker, and EDI isn't just about ethnicity. There's there's there's there's other things that we need to focus on. And if we are focusing on ethnicity , it needs to be on that rather than diluting it with other, other things. But it was right at the start of the journey umm and three other colleagues joined this working group, and I sat in the first meeting and they were all talking about all this training they could do to schools and how we could train about inclusion and how we could train about racism and anti-racism. And and I just kind of reflected back like, hold on a second, we've got a service of 30 EPs here. Every single one of us is white. Who are WE

to be going out to anywhere else and saying, this is how you do it. So I think that that that, I've seen that replicated in the profession around the climate. So what we can do to train schools about climate anxiety is like, well hold on, we haven't even talked as a team about how we feel about this, and the emotional impact on us? How can we go out and start to reach and train and do insets to schools and local authority systems where actually what is underneath this is really personal and hard process. [they can't] confront the sort of the existential nature of it is is really important. So but maybe that's, you know, maybe you can maybe you can separate them out just you know, 'Well, I don't need to do that, to do some good training'. Yeah, it's, for me, it would not feel congruent.

RESEARCHER: Right. Yeah. And I think so. I'm, I'm kind of wondering about now your your sort of your experience of working with you mentioned earlier kind of climate anxiety, climate distress, that that that sort of whole area with young people. Do you have experience of of working with young people who are experiencing that?

Heath: Yeah. Yeah. umm something that really kind of picked up and became more prevalent in discussions with teachers and senior leaders in schools, I suppose in the past, like three or four years? which I wonder if it coincides more with sort of school strike action, And you know, the the the media attention that that received and young people feeling perhaps more I don't know, they've got more agency, got more voice, or that they should have.

And perhaps just talking about it a bit more so. Yes, I do. Umm I suppose it was often, although this was never said my analysis was often, okay, this young person is really worried about the climate and the planet and you know, they don't want to get the bus to school now, because the bus is a diesel bus and blah blah blah umm how do we stop them feeling that way? Which is always a bit like, well, [laughing] that's, I'm not going to help with that. You know, it's not.. yeah having to have that discussion around… It's just not a reasonable response. You know, lots of stuff that they're talking about and referring to is really flipping scary. You know, it's, what do you want them to feel? You know? I'm not really going to ethically feel comfortable helping them to learn to ignore it. umm so, yeah, that was the underlying tone of lots of requests for EP involvement that I got, you know, that, that this is an issue and how do we stop it? And my sense was that, not all the time, I can think of 2 young people where this wasn't the case, but I think sort of the four or five others that I'm thinking about is that they've never really been listened to or validated, that we'd never, no one had ever really stopped and kind of explored what is worrying them, is worry even the right word, you know? And you know, for a lot of children underpinning it, there was quite a lot of anger. Anger at sort of.. adults, and and and and I think it was the adults that was, you know, and one young person, was about ten, was really angry at the head teacher. the head teachers got this like bloody huge diesel jaguar or something, and just really seeing like this, this head teachers got no credibility in these conversations in terms of like helping this

Desire of others to stop climate fears/worries.

others avoidance of CC?

derision/ridicule frustration would collude to avoid the topic

relating to others fears

These are reactions make sense

Disconnect with prof. expectations

focus on stopping

no one is listening

others are avoiding the topic of CC

questioning others experience

anger at others

anger at others

lack of engagement/ accountability

others want to avoid/shut down CC

frustration at others

Rejection of others response

shared experience of CC

questioning his EP role

CC is scary

sense of others avoidance

CC concerns aren't validated generally

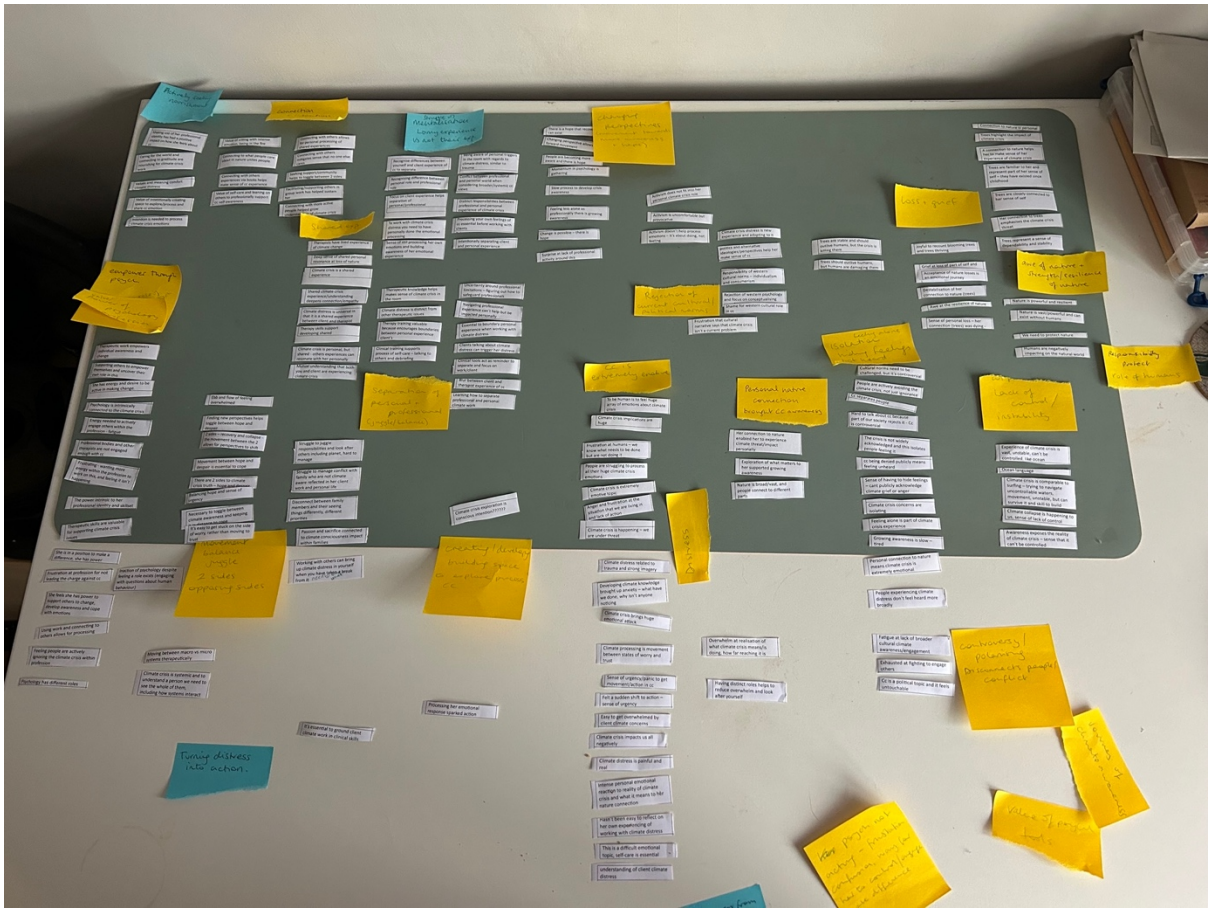
sense of ignorance of others

CC awareness/ engagement is needed to support CC distress

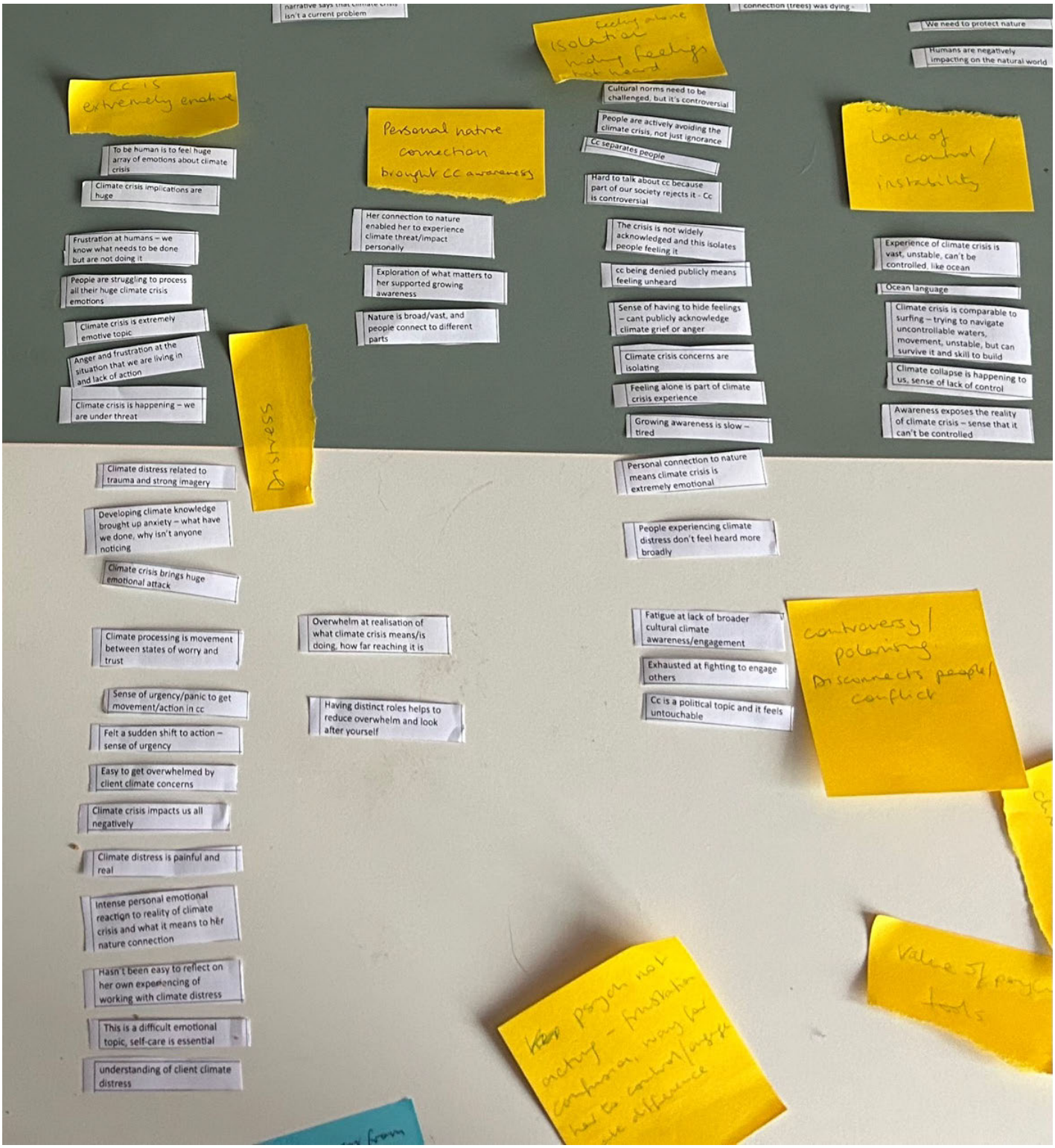
young person deal with it. But there wasn't that sense of, you know, I can say that because that's the head teacher and, you know, but we're really angry that you know, that decision to buy that thing is destroying my future [laughs] which I… dont disagree! I fully agree, actually. You know, so there was a process of kind of validation, some young people, the two, the other two that I'm thinking about are.. they have really supportive parents and sort of school staff who, who had spent time kind of helping them to understand but had almost kind of… gone the other way, that it was like… the focus was on supporting the young person to do do do, do, you know, action, action, action. Almost kind of adding to their sense of 'this is my responsibility. I have to change. I have to' you know, which in the other sense was like well I think, you know, we need to kind of help them see that this is going to lead to like burnout and just exhaustion. You know, it's not his responsibility. He can obviously do things like the individual level is is really important, but actually knowing when enough is enough and that's really important too [laughs] But that's and that's not something that I have learnt through training or through being a psychologist. That's something I've learnt through things like this magazine, from my own personal journey, knowing that, you know, there is a huge focus and an impetus for individuals to do, do, do and government systems really love that. You know, that it's your responsibility, you should change your lifestyle. But my personal journey and sort of talking with with people who are on that with me and and through these sorts of magazines, you kind of learn you know what it's not

Appendix H – Mapping Experiential Statements

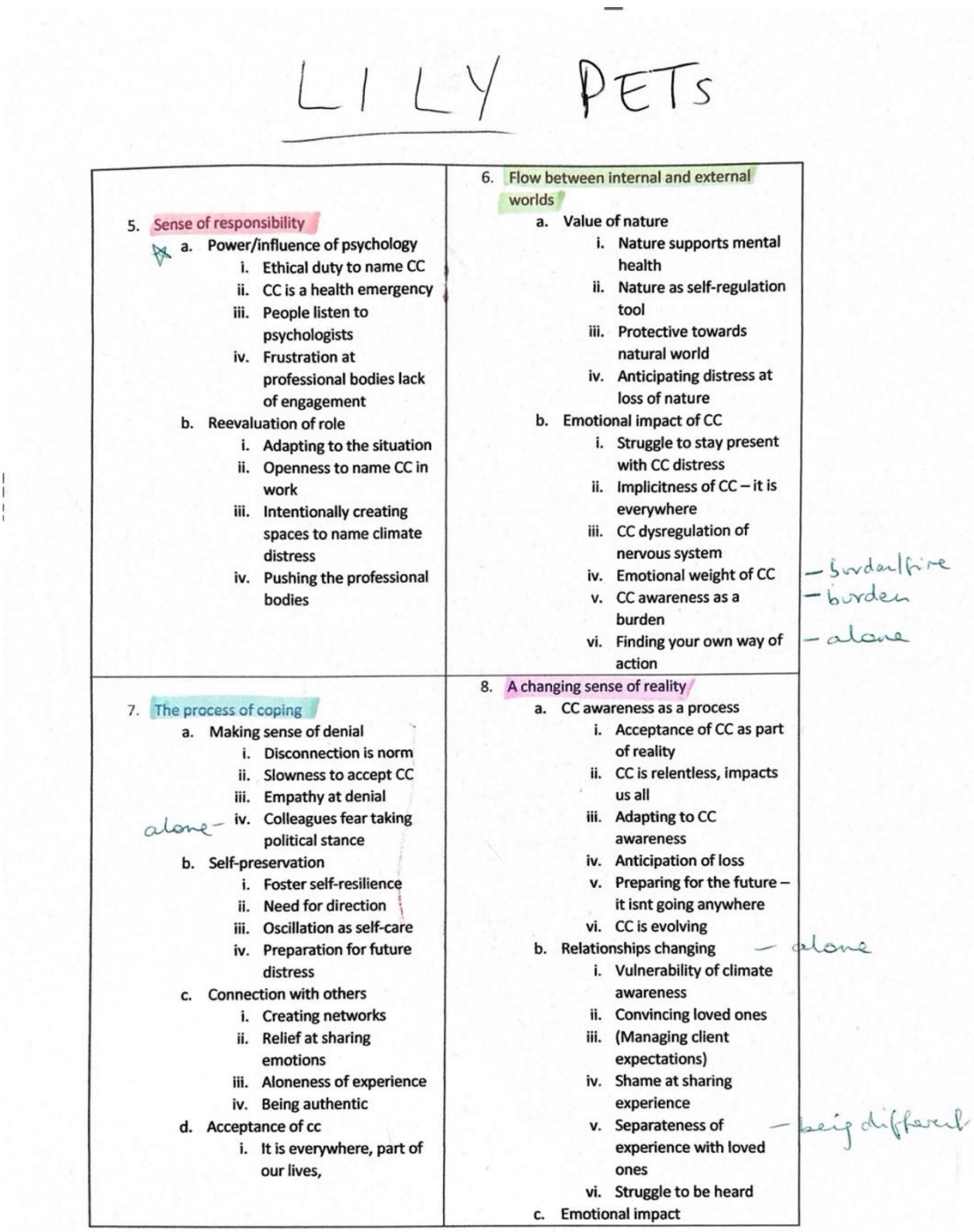
Mapping of experiential statements for Jasmine:



Close up for detail:



Appendix I – Example of PETs Table



LILY PETs

5. Sense of responsibility
   - a. Power/influence of psychology
     - i. Ethical duty to name CC
     - ii. CC is a health emergency
     - iii. People listen to psychologists
     - iv. Frustration at professional bodies lack of engagement
   - b. Reevaluation of role
     - i. Adapting to the situation
     - ii. Openness to name CC in work
     - iii. Intentionally creating spaces to name climate distress
     - iv. Pushing the professional bodies

6. Flow between internal and external worlds
   - a. Value of nature
     - i. Nature supports mental health
     - ii. Nature as self-regulation tool
     - iii. Protective towards natural world
     - iv. Anticipating distress at loss of nature
   - b. Emotional impact of CC
     - i. Struggle to stay present with CC distress
     - ii. Implicitness of CC – it is everywhere
     - iii. CC dysregulation of nervous system
     - iv. Emotional weight of CC – burden
     - v. CC awareness as a burden – burden
     - vi. Finding your own way of action – alone

7. The process of coping
   - a. Making sense of denial
     - i. Disconnection is norm
     - ii. Slowness to accept CC
     - iii. Empathy at denial
     - iv. Colleagues fear taking political stance – alone
   - b. Self-preservation
     - i. Foster self-resilience
     - ii. Need for direction
     - iii. Oscillation as self-care
     - iv. Preparation for future distress
   - c. Connection with others
     - i. Creating networks
     - ii. Relief at sharing emotions
     - iii. Aloneness of experience
     - iv. Being authentic
   - d. Acceptance of cc
     - i. It is everywhere, part of our lives,

8. A changing sense of reality
   - a. CC awareness as a process
     - i. Acceptance of CC as part of reality
     - ii. CC is relentless, impacts us all
     - iii. Adapting to CC awareness
     - iv. Anticipation of loss
     - v. Preparing for the future – it isnt going anywhere
     - vi. CC is evolving
   - b. Relationships changing – alone
     - i. Vulnerability of climate awareness
     - ii. Convincing loved ones
     - iii. (Managing client expectations)
     - iv. Shame at sharing experience
     - v. Separateness of experience with loved ones – being different
     - vi. Struggle to be heard
   - c. Emotional impact

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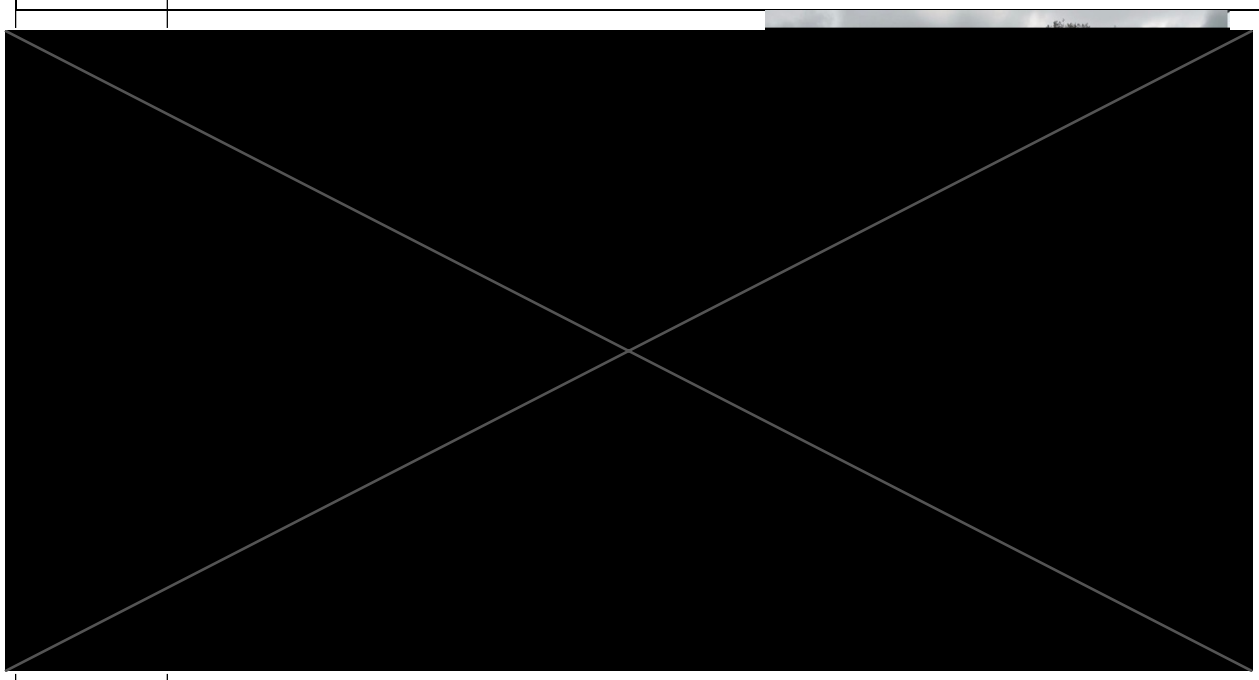

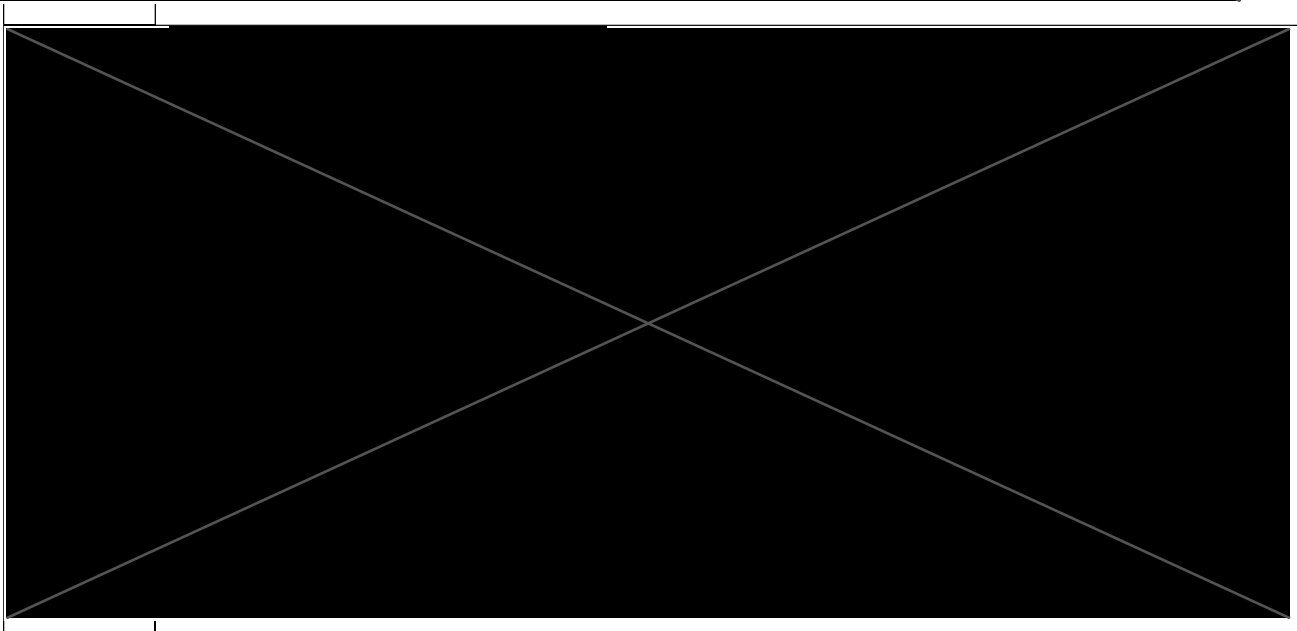

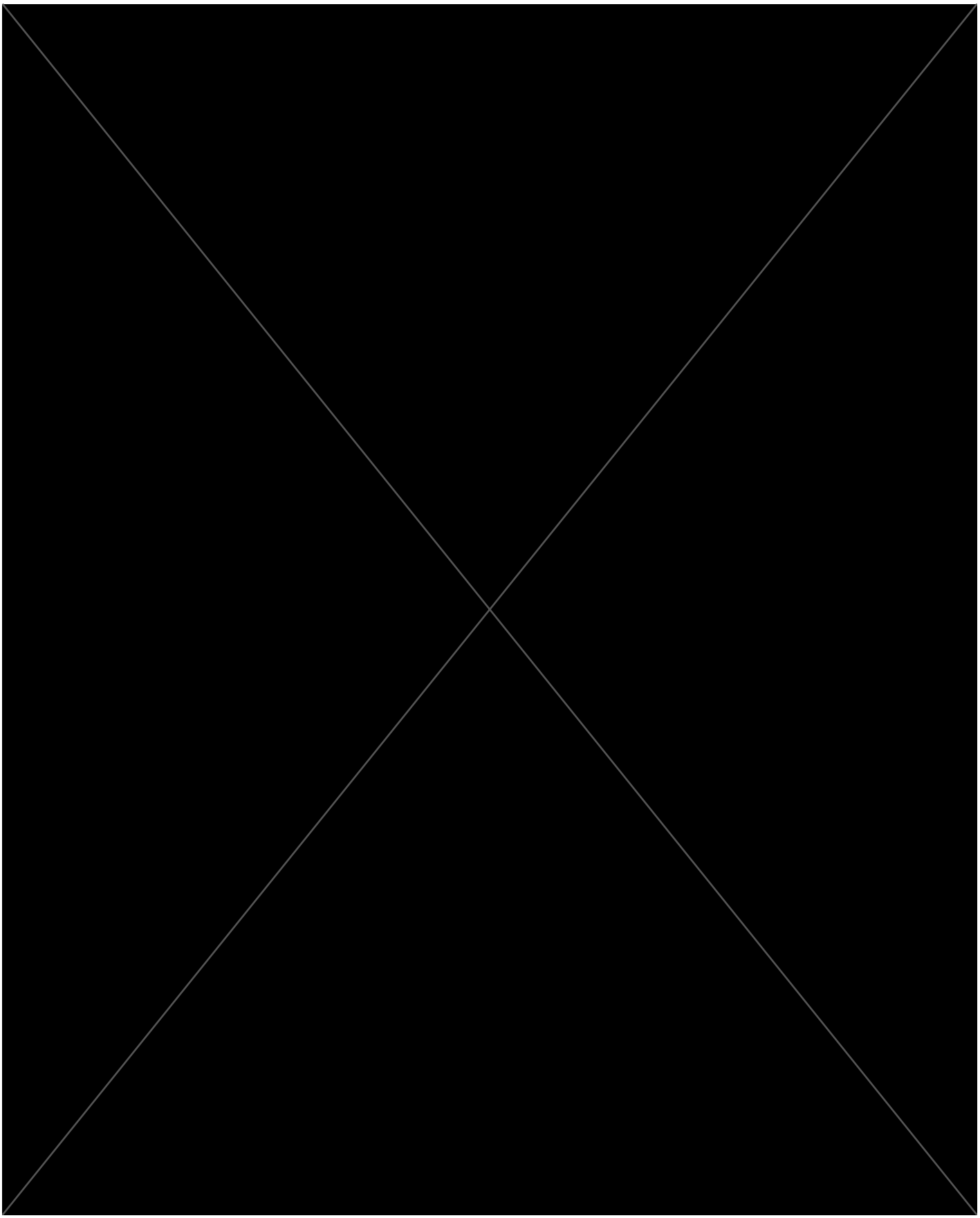

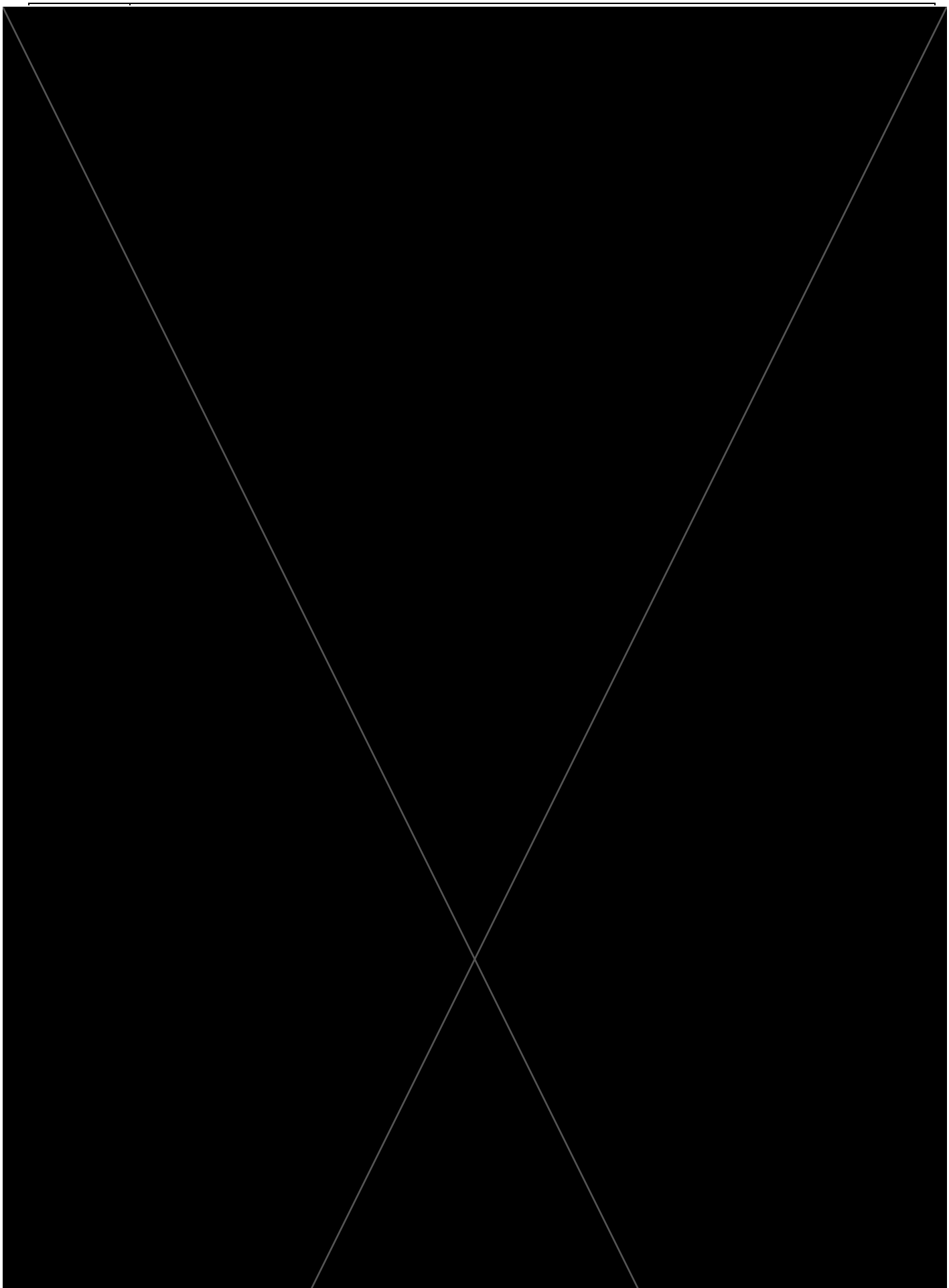

Part II: Publishable Paper

How do U.K. talking therapists experience the climate crisis: exploring professional experiences

Appendices

Guidelines for submission:

Doctoral Student Submissions

Doctoral student submissions of a high standard are also welcome. However, if you are unfamiliar with writing for publication please ask an experienced academic colleague – perhaps a supervisor – to edit your paper prior to submission. This is because work submitted to a learned publication is very different to work for pedagogical purposes.

1. Length
Papers must be no more than 5,000 words (including abstract, reference list, tables and figures). Please note that while some authors prefer greater word length for qualitative publications The Counselling Psychology Review is unable to grant this.

2. Manuscript requirements

- Download and complete the cover page. Contact details will be published if the paper is accepted.
- Apart from the cover page, the document should be free of information identifying the author(s).
- Authors should follow the society's guidelines for the use of inclusive language and all references must be presented in the society's style, which is similar to APA style.
- A structured abstract of up to 250 words should be included as detailed in the Cover Page. Please ensure that title and abstract are included on both the manuscript document and the cover sheet.
- Approximately five keywords should be provided for each paper.
- Authors are responsible for acquiring written permission to publish lengthy quotations, illustrations, etc., for which they do not own copyright.
- Graphs, diagrams, etc., must have titles which must not be part of the image.
- The Counselling Psychology Review is published in black and white B5 size. Images must be readable in this format.
- Submissions should be sent as email attachments. Please ensure all relevant documents are attached to the same email. Please add 'CPR Submission' in the email subject bar. Please expect an email acknowledgment of your submission.
- Please make all changes after review using Track Changes and return them to the Editor-in-Chief.

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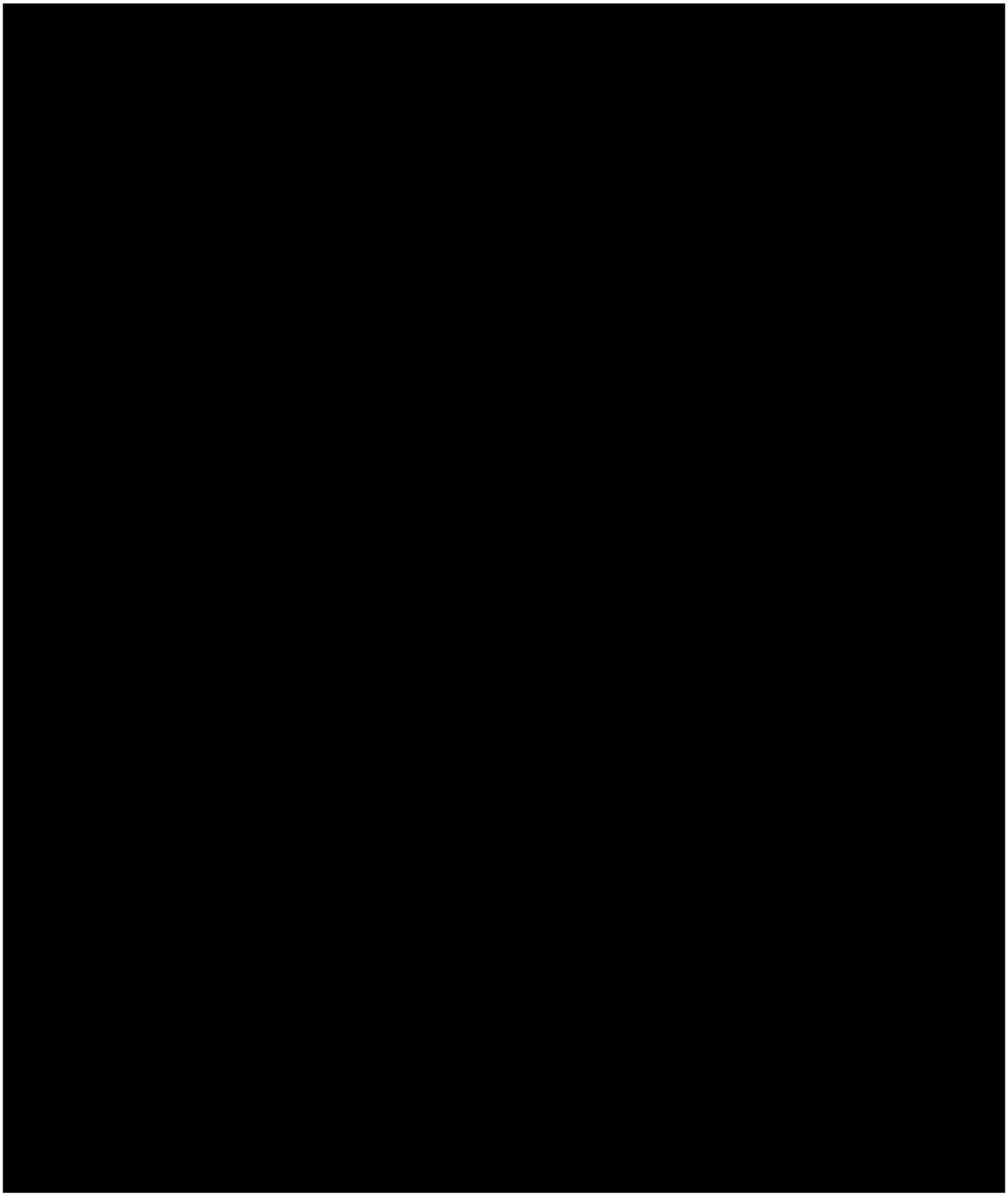

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