THE EXPERIENCE OF ECO-ANXIETY OF INDIVIDUALS WHO HAVE BEEN THROUGH AN ECOPSYCHOLOGY SUPPORT GROUP FOR FACING THE CLIMATE CRISIS: A GROUNDED THEORY INQUIRY

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Abstract

A contextual perspective on mental health is foundational to developing a humanistic understanding of wellbeing. However, within research and clinical practice, there is a notable lack of consideration of the environmental context beyond the immediate family system, despite scientific consensus concerning the threats to wellbeing presented by the climate crisis. A review of the literature indicates a limited understanding of how people experience our global context of the climate crisis. The experience of "waking up" to the climate crisis has been described most often using the term "eco-anxiety", although the research base is fragmented by a range of descriptions and psychological theories. Until now, psychological theory has lacked the support of in-depth exploration of this subjective experience. To address this gap, the current study interviewed individuals who self-identified as experiencing eco-anxiety, and who had been through an ecopsychology support group for facing the climate crisis. A constructivist grounded theory method was chosen in line with a critical realist ontology and moderate social constructionist epistemology. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 13 adults who self-identified as experiencing "eco-anxiety", and who had attended an ecopsychology group for facing the climate crisis called "The Work That Reconnects." Data analysis generated two core categories of theory: "the psychosocial processes of eco-anxiety", and "the psychosocial processes of regeneratively sustained eco-anxiety." These findings are discussed in relation to the extant literature on facing the climate crisis. The research suggests psychological, emotional, and social support is helpful in supporting the wellbeing of those seeking to sustain conscious awareness of our context of living on a suffering planet. A summary of clinical implications and recommendations for further investigation is provided.

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Abbreviations

CoP	Counselling Psychology
CoPs	Counselling Psychologists
CGT	Constructivist Grounded Theory
GT	Grounded Theory
Pt	Participant
Pts	Participants
WTR	The Work That Reconnects

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A Poem by Participant Willow

Slipping away from us

When it has all but slipped away from us, tell me, what should I do?

You will not lie down,

nor will you seek refuge in an answer.

You will not sit in the artificial light of hope,

nor will you languish in the dark shadows of despair.

Instead, you will open yourself to the full force of the storm.

And when it feels like it has smashed you into a thousand tiny pieces, then, and only then, will you act from a place of knowing.

Here onwards, your heart will carry you each step of the way on a journey that knows when all is lost, life truly begins.

You will no longer hold on,

nor will you grasp at all that has gone.

You'll not stand in the wings looking on.

You will shine like you never have shone.

You will not save the best of you ‘till tomorrow,

nor will you forsake all that you love.

In your arms, love of life held so strong

you will dance to the band's final song

And not one single tear will you shed in remorse

that though you rose early with the dawn

it took until sunset before you truly opened your eyes.

Now... sit at life's table and feast.

1 Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Overview of Introduction Chapter

This chapter begins with a brief explanation of the thesis style and structure. This is followed by an introduction to the origins of this research. The chapter concludes with an introduction to key terms, the mental health implications of climate change, and the lack of understanding of the psychosocial experience of facing the climate crisis, which is commonly referred to in the literature as 'eco-anxiety'.

1.2 Thesis Style and Structure

This thesis offers a first-person account of the research process in line with the social constructionist approach, where both the researcher and the researched are subject to enquiry throughout (Charmaz, 2011). Following this introduction to the research aims, Chapter Two provides a critical review of the emerging literature base on psychological responses to climate change, with a focus on eco-anxiety. Chapter Three provides an account of the selected Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) method, methodological decision-making, and ethical considerations throughout the research process. Chapter Four presents the grounded theory produced and defines four main categories and relationships of psychosocial processes identified. Chapter Five explores the theoretical understanding of eco-anxiety in relation to the research aims and existing literature, followed by a critique of the rigour and quality of this research. The thesis concludes with a summary of the implications for CoP practice and recommendations for future research.

1.3 Origins of Research

1.3.1 *Personal Context*

My personal interest in eco-anxiety arose from my developing professional identity as a counselling psychologist in training and values for pluralist and integrative approaches to wellbeing (Milton, 2010) that attracted me to this field of psychology. As Kasket (2012) stated, "our world is unimaginably diverse … and our selves are multifaceted. Much depends on the contexts in which we are always inescapably, relationally embedded"

(p.65). The writing of Martin Milton and Elaine Kasket deepened my understanding of the responsibilities of counselling psychologists: firstly, taking the importance of context seriously when applying ethics to practice; secondly, focusing on wellbeing rather than pathology or symptom reduction (Douglas et al., 2016); and thirdly, addressing issues of power, threat, and injustice (Moller, 2011). Because of these values, I was struck by my clients' emotions about climate change during my first year of clinical training. My clients expressed anguish about climate change, guilt about their consumer choices they felt were contributing to the problem, and a sense of shame when disavowing their feelings, which seemed unbearable at times. I struggled to know how to welcome the political issue of climate change into the session, "be with" my own eco-anxiety, and navigate the intersection of 'the collective' when working with 'the personal'. I sought research and training to learn how I could more adequately support these clients, but could not find a single study focused on 'being with' emotional responses to climate change or supporting clients in honouring their pain to support understanding of their experience in its global and environmental context.

1.3.2 *Relationship to the Research*

In response to this topic arising in my clinical work, I attended a three-day ecopsychology support group called 'The Work That Reconnects', which helped me notice my emotional and psychological responses to climate change. I was struck by how the group facilitated a deeply emotional process and was curious about how this experiential learning and connection between self, others, and nature had occurred. I was inspired by several participants who appeared to have the capacity to empathise with the suffering of others, despite the sadness and sense of powerlessness this seemed to evoke, which felt highly relevant to my clinical training. Ecopsychology literature highlights the importance of befriending our 'darker' emotions regarding climate change through gratitude and rediscovering our interconnectedness with 'other-than-human' life forms (Rust, 2020). This builds capacity to allow "sorrows to ripen" "by passing them through our hearts … making … good compost out of all that grief so that we can learn from it, enhancing our … collective knowing" (Macy & Brown, 2014, pp. 298). The group I attended seemed to increase a sense of empowerment and reduce loneliness in the group. Although well documented in ecopsychology literature (Greenspan, 2004; Hollis-Walker, 2012; Weintrobe, 2013), I did not see this focus on being with emotions reflected in existing climate psychology research. Instead, existing research was dominated by behavioural

approaches to reducing human drivers of climate change while promoting personal wellbeing. Understanding the subjective experience of facing climate change had been overlooked by the rapidly expanding research base, therapeutic models and terminology describing eco-anxiety.

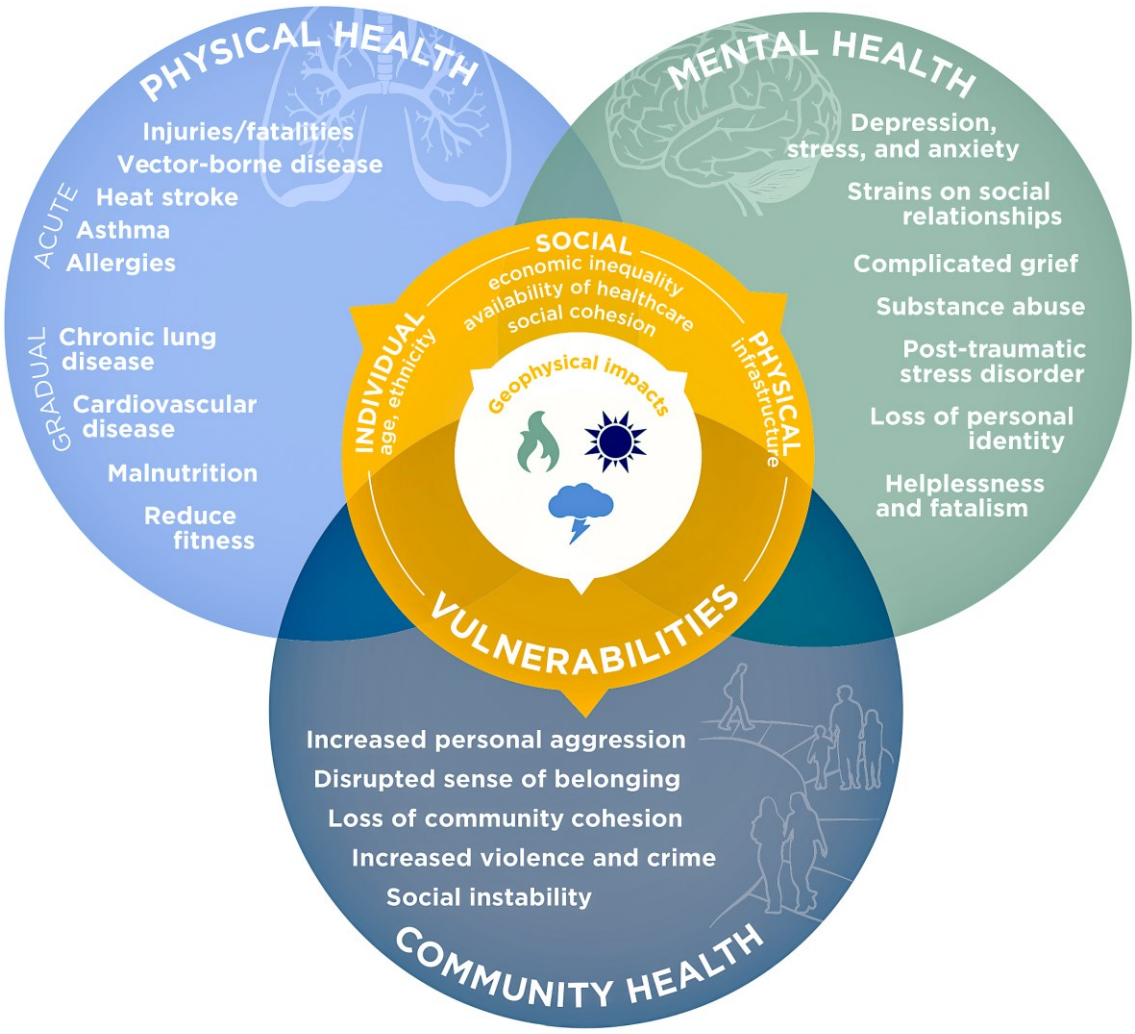
1.4 Introduction to Terms

1.4.1 *Climate Change and the Climate Crisis*

'Climate change' today refers to the accelerated heating of global temperatures due to increased greenhouse gas emissions resulting from human activities, including the use of fossil fuels and deforestation (Masson-Delmotte et al., 2018). This research is grounded in the consensus of the scientific community regarding the severity of climate change threats to physical, mental, and community health (see Figure 1). The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has predicted severe impacts to human health, agriculture, and natural ecosystems if global average temperatures reach 2ºC above pre-industrial levels (Masson-Delmotte et al., 2018). However, even if current climate change mitigation commitments are successfully delivered by governments worldwide, these are calculated to support only a 66% likelihood of global average temperature rises being limited to 3.5ºC before 2100 (United Nations Environment Programme, 2020), which would result in far more extreme impacts. The heating of the planet resulting from greenhouse gas emissions already impacts the physical and mental health of millions of people, especially in less economically developed countries (Clayton & Manning, 2018; Watts et al., 2021). The term 'the climate crisis' will therefore be used throughout this thesis to reflect the realities of climate change and to align with the language of participants. In the UK, where people are less impacted physically by existing climate change, people experience its effects psychologically when they become aware of immediate and future impacts (Clayton et al., 2017; Ojala, 2016). Due to the magnitude of the threats, some respond with denial, heightened awareness, concern, and alarm (Verplanken et al., 2020). The experience of being 'concerned' or 'alarmed', through conscious awareness of threats to life on Earth caused by the climate crisis, has been described using several terms in psychological literature, often as 'eco-anxiety' (Verplanken et al., 2020.

Figure 1

The Impacts of Climate Change on Wellbeing



Note. From *"Mental Health and Our Changing Climate: Impacts, Implications, and Guidance."* (p.14-15), by S. Clayton et al., 2017, American Psychological Association, and ecoAmerica. Copyright 2017 by American Psychological Association, and ecoAmerica.

1.4.2 *Eco-anxiety*

Eco-anxiety is the "increasingly popular" term (Verplanken et al., 2020, p.2) used to describe the challenging emotional responses associated with learning about the causes and effects of climate change (Hogg et al., 2021; Pihkala, 2018). There is debate surrounding the appropriate language to use when describing emotional responses to climate change (Pihkala, 2020). Some feel that 'anxiety', which has become a pathologized term, should be avoided in favour of terms like grief (Cunsolo & Landman, 2017). Conversely, others have argued terms such as pre-trauma (Van Susteren & Al-Delaimy, 2020) and eco-anxiety, while imperfect, are still useful descriptors of the

subjective experience of alarm about the climate crisis (Pihkala, 2019). When discussing the concept of eco-anxiety, I am aligned with psychologists (Clayton et al., 2017; Hogg et al., 2021) that believe there is no universal or singular way to understand these experiences. Therefore, rather than focusing on anxiety as the term might suggest, 'eco-anxiety' should be considered a 'catch-all' descriptor provided by ecopsychology (Albrecht, 2011) to refer to the spectrum of emotional, mental, and somatic responses to the scientific evidence and present realities of the climate crisis (Hickman, 2020). Hickman (2020) distinguished eco-anxiety from a simple 'threat response' and argued it refers to the emotional response to knowing we in the UK have not only caused the climate crisis but are also failing to slow the damage, leaving us both "powerfully causative and powerlessly helpless" (p.414). This experience has been described as including depression, hopelessness, despair, severe anxiety, grief (Bourque & Cunsolo Willox, 2014; Randall, 2009), rage, guilt and/or shame (Pihkala, 2018), global dread (Kahn & Hasbach, 2012), survivor guilt, vicarious trauma, substance abuse, and suicidal ideation (Hayes et al., 2019). However, eco-anxiety has also been associated with increased positive emotions and 'adaptive' responses such as determination (Verplanken et al., 2020), compassion, optimism, altruism, and a sense of meaning, hope (Ojala, 2013), and companionship as those experiencing eco-anxiety gather to console amid the anticipated chaos and loss (Pihkala, 2018).

Ecotherapists have provided a useful typology (see Glossary) for our emotional responses to our natural surroundings; this acknowledges the diversity (positive and negative) and nuanced complexity of these responses (Kahn & Hasbach, 2012). Like Ojala (2016), I adopt a critical stance to the view of eco-anxiety as a solely 'negative' or 'dark' state. This research seeks to help "cut through the noise" (p.412) about what label is most appropriate (Hickman, 2020) by arguing for a holistic approach to understanding this multifaceted experience. In this way, I aim to contribute to the formation of a coherent research base that supports greater shared understanding by building on the existing fragmented literature base, which is predominantly composed of studies examining separate aspects of the phenomena (Pihkala, 2018). Such a holistic approach arguably complements the reality counselling psychologists encounter in clinical practice where complex and multifaceted sharing of clients warrants depth of listening and a multiplicity of responses, rather than the identification and modification of individual 'symptoms' or 'behaviours'. If left unsupported, eco-anxiety can negatively impact quality of life (Berry et al., 2010, 2018; Doherty, 2015; Fritze et al., 2008). Several publications have provided

recommendations for supporting individuals seeking help with facing the climate crisis (Buzzell, 2016; Davenport, 2017; Macy & Brown, 2014; Pihkala, 2019; Randall, 2006; Rust, 2008). However, current therapeutic recommendations lack the support of an established research base that addresses the subjective experience of eco-anxiety, especially of those who have accessed therapeutic support, such as an ecopsychology group.

1.4.3 *Ecopsychology*

Ecopsychology is a "solid theoretical, cultural and critical" school of psychology (Buzzell & Chalquist, 2010, p.18) that seeks to rouse the intrinsic sense of ecological reciprocity in the depths of our psyche (Roszak, 2002) and an environmental conscious awareness (O'Sullivan & Taylor, 2004) to restore an "ecological sense of self" and the relational interconnectedness (Hathaway, 2016, p. 7) between human beings and the 'Earth community' or 'other-than-human' life. Ecotherapy refers to ecopsychology applied to therapeutic practice (Davis & Atkins, 2004). Ecopsychology focuses on healing the alienation between human beings and the natural environment in which they evolved (Bragg, 2015). Ecopsychology is arguably equipped to inform counselling psychologists (CoPs) in applying ethics to therapeutic practice by building understanding of the "neglected connection" to our "wider psychological landscape" (Milton, 2016, p.384). Because ecopsychologists believe ecology to be fundamental to wellbeing and being human, they support clients in reflecting on anthropogenic damage to the environment that has occurred through anthropocentric rejection or denial of interaction with natural ecosystems (Plotkin, 2010). Ecotherapy complements "tenets at the heart of counselling psychology" with "new, imaginative and embodied practices while retaining a thoughtful and ethical stance" (Milton, 2010, p.302). Ecopsychology shares values with counselling psychology for challenging discrimination (British Psychological Society, 2005) and addressing injustice (Cutts, 2013; Moller, 2011) for humans and 'other-than-human' life (Plotkin, 2010).

Ecopsychology has developed outside of mainstream psychology, which introduces potential challenges for academic rigour and scientific credibility. However, Milton (2016) suggested this is an asset rather than a constraint. When dealing with "big shifts in consciousness" (Higley & Milton, 2008, p.15), as prompted by the climate crisis, looking beyond conventional thought is vital for "fresh perspectives" and "inspiration" (p.15) whilst maintaining a reflective and critical stance. Vera and Speight (2003) argued

for the necessary expansion of therapeutic approaches to address the growing mental health needs of increasingly diverse populations. Similarly, counselling psychologist Godfrey-Faussett (2016) asserted we are obligated to offer therapeutic interventions beyond the dominant modernist approaches that propagate a view of clients as separate and isolated individuals (Douglas et al., 2016). Developing an understanding of eco-anxiety through research with participants of ecotherapeutic approaches is arguably an important next step to develop a more multi-faceted and holistic approach to supporting wellbeing in the context of climate change.

1.4.4 *The Work That Reconnects*

Several ecotherapeutic groups seek to empower people through group processes to face climate change and move from despair to empowerment, so they can take action (Weller, 2015). The best-established ecopsychology group of this kind, 'The Work That Reconnects' (WTR), was pioneered by Joanna Macy in the 1980s (Macy & Brown, 2014). Hundreds of thousands of participants have been supported in developing the capacity to be with the intense emotional and psychological experience of facing climate change (Macy, 2020; Pihkala, 2019). The main stages of the group process are: 'practising gratitude', which builds the resilience required to face difficult realities and emotions from a state of love and connection; 'honouring the pain' related to our global context through exercises for 'being with' and processing difficult emotions; 'seeing with new eyes'; and 'going forth' to act congruently with this experiential learning (Macy & Brown, 2014). The group has been described by participants as a deeply transformational learning experience (Hathaway, 2016; Hollis-Walker, 2012).

2 Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Chapter Two Overview

In this chapter, I explain why it is important to explore the experience of eco-anxiety for UK adults who have attended an eco-psychology group for facing the climate crisis. I begin by outlining the literature review aims, design, process, and findings. Adopting a critical realist ontology and moderate social constructionist epistemology, I review the relevant literature within the fast-growing research base of climate psychology to highlight the current lack of understanding of the experience of eco-anxiety. I end by highlighting literature that acknowledges CoPs need to learn from those who have experienced ecopsychological therapeutic interventions; this is important so that counselling psychologists take seriously clients' environments and context, which is a key tenant of counselling psychology (Milton, 2016). I conclude by introducing the research question: "What is the experience of eco-anxiety for individuals who have been through an ecopsychology group for facing the climate crisis?"

2.2 The Process of the Literature Review

There is a debate within Grounded Theory (GT) literature regarding the appropriate time a literature review should take place as it could influence the analysis and validity of emergent theory. Charmaz (2014) and Dunne (2011) argued it is unrealistic for a researcher who must provide a research rationale and ethics application to have no prior knowledge of the literature. Therefore, using Yardley's (2000) model for research quality assessment, an initial literature review was drafted to develop an overview of existing literature. I then endeavoured to remain open-minded to different and contrasting findings as I collected and analysed participant transcripts. It was challenging to find studies that met the original inclusion criteria as terminology describing the experience of 'eco-anxiety' is varied and rapidly evolving (Cianconi et al., 2020). Therefore, to support the development of a more integrated research base, Pihkala's (2018) broad 'umbrella' definition of eco-anxiety was adopted. Due to the paucity of eco-anxiety focused research based in the UK (Ingle & Jafry, 2019), I reviewed studies related to eco-anxiety with populations that had not sought therapeutic support and were situated outside the UK.

2.2.1 *Aim*

The aim of the literature review was to develop a comprehensive overview of literature exploring the subjective experience associated with learning about the causes and effects of the climate crisis, commonly referred to as eco-anxiety, for adults living in the UK, and specifically for those who have accessed ecopsychology-based group support.

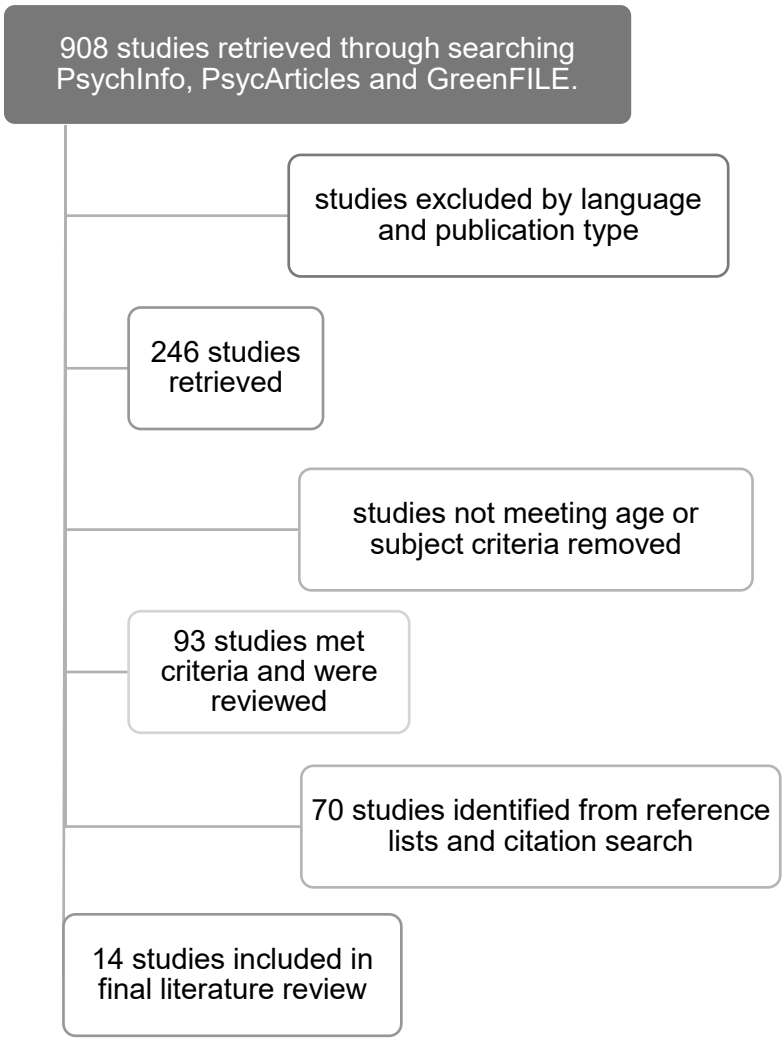
2.2.2 *Design: Inclusion Criteria and Search Methods*

Areas of literature considered relevant for review were research about: eco-anxiety, and/or ecotherapy, and/or ecopsychology, and/or ecological distress, and/or climate (change) anxiety, and/or environmental anxiety, and/or climate grief, and/or pre-traumatic stress disorder, and/or grounded theory. Results excluded were duplicates, written in a language other than English, book reviews, and records of non-text results such as abstracts of conference presentations. Because this research focuses on the psychosocial processes of facing the climate crisis among adults living in the UK, studies solely concerned with the following issues were excluded: the subjective experience of eco-anxiety of children or teenagers; direct experience of climate change impacts; climate change communication; climate activism; and the physical science of climate change.

Electronic searches were conducted through PsycINFO, PsycArticles, and GreenFILE. The search terms (“eco-anxiety”, or “climate anxiety”, or “climate change anxiety”, or “global warming worry”, or “eco-fear”, or “eco-dread”, or “eco grief”, or “ecological grief”, or “ecological stress”, or “pre-trauma”) were combined with (“climate crisis”, or “climate change”, or “climate psychology”). Exclusion criteria were set to only include English language and academic literature. Reference lists and citations from relevant papers were further searched using EBSCO.

Figure 2

Flowchart of Literature Review Search Strategy



2.2.3 *Search Outcomes*

As shown in Figure 2, 908 studies were reviewed, and 14 were found to meet the criteria. Literature was analysed using thematic analysis techniques to develop higher-order themes based on their convergence and divergence from the research focus (Charmaz, 2016). This involved coding study findings and developing descriptive themes, which were compared and developed to generate analytical themes. From this review, six themes were identified (see Table 1).

Table 1

The Thematic Structure of The Literature Review

Research Type	Themes	Studies	Findings
Mixed methods research	1. Diagnosis and pathology	Two survey studies One literature review	Eco-anxiety is a significant experience highly relevant to the work of all psychologists.
	2. Multifaceted experience	Three survey studies	Eco-anxiety was not just anxiety-related and involved several different emotions.
	3. Spectrum of emotional experiencing	Two survey studies	Emotions associated with eco-anxiety cannot be understood with a binary positive or negative categorisation.
	4. A values-based understanding	Three survey studies	Eco-anxiety experience was related to the value systems of participants.
Qualitative research in the context of support	5. Being with eco-anxiety in therapy	Mixed methods study including in-depth interviews Interview study	Eco-anxiety was difficult to work with therapeutically for both client and therapist, according to therapists.
	6. Therapeutic groups for eco-anxiety	Two feedback studies One case study	Experiences of eco-anxiety of group participants suggested group processes of sharing and being with like-minded people helped the experience be transformative.

Note. See Appendix A for a summary table corresponding to each theme in the literature.

2.3 Introduction to Eco-Anxiety Research

Psychological responses to climate change are diverse and range from denial to heightened awareness, distress, and grief (Swim et al., 2009). A substantial number of the global population are highly concerned (Verplanken et al., 2020) because "a stable climate is the most fundamental determinant of human health" (Maibach et al., 2021, p.1). Psychological responses to the climate crisis have been researched globally: in Australia, New Zealand, America (Leiserowitz et al., 2019), Canada (Durkalec et al., 2015), China (Wang & Zhou, 2020), Maldives (Hickman, 2019), Nigeria (Chukwuorji et al., 2017), and Sweden (Ojala, 2016). A UK survey study reported an increase in worry about climate change, with 27% of Britons ranking the environment as one of the top three issues facing Britain (Triodos Bank, 2019). Telephone interviews with a proportionally weighted,

representative sample of 1,007 UK adults reportedly found 85% were 'concerned' about climate change, with 52% 'very concerned' (Ipsos MORI, 2019, 2020). This was corroborated by a British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) funded survey study (BACP & YouGov, 2020) that reported 55% of UK adults are affected by eco-anxiety and that climate change has a negative impact on their mental health. Of those reportedly affected, concern was reported about 'other-than-human' life (65%), future generations (58%), and their own lives being impacted (30%). The BACP Deputy Chief Executive highlighted that people with less financial resources, who may be more vulnerable to the devastating impacts of climate change, have reported feeling helpless, fearful, and depressed about threats they face (BACP & YouGov, 2020) as "the world's most vulnerable, marginalized and disempowered people who tend to be harmed first and worst" (Maibach et al., 2021, p.1).

2.4 Mixed Methods Research on Eco-anxiety

2.4.1 *Eco-anxiety and Diagnoses*

The first in-depth study into the emotional impact of climate change with Australian adults (n=275) measured 'negative' emotional responses, including concern, tenseness, worry, anxiety, depression, hopelessness, powerlessness, sadness, helplessness, stress, anger, and fear (Searle & Gow, 2010). Two factors accounted for 64 per cent of the total variance: climate change anxiety and climate change hopelessness. Correlational analysis suggested the emotional impact of climate change was influenced by pro-environmental values and beliefs, tolerance of uncertainty, and anxiety about the future. Concern about climate change was associated with symptoms indicative of clinical depression, anxiety, and stress. Because this study only explored 'negative' emotions, this pioneering research seemed to support pathologizing of psychological responses to climate change.

In a recently published systematic review of the impacts of climate change on mental health (Cianconi et al., 2020), qualitative research only represented 8% of reviewed studies. Research privileging personal accounts of the emotional and psychological impacts of climate change was not the primary focus of this review, which reflects the prevailing positivist paradigm within the climate psychology research base. Within psychological practice, the positivist paradigm is reinforced by the continued practice of defining mental health disorders according to the biomedical model using the Diagnosis

and Statistical Manual (DSM) (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). In this way, the review encouraged validation of eco-anxiety within the DSM under the branch of "ecopsychiatry" due to the "growing need for early mental health interventions" (p. 11). This biomedical approach does not consider personal values or the potential validity and value of distress (Sequeira & Van Scoyoc, 2002). This review explained the notable lack of studies might have been due to the complexity of the difficulties described and the varied new terms attempting to describe them. The authors proposed eco-anxiety research could advance more quickly with a standard measure for determining if a set of climate distress 'symptoms' warrants a diagnosis. Potential clinical classifications of eco-anxiety were further explored by Clayton and Karazsia's (2020) development of their 'four dimensions' climate change anxiety scale. Climate change anxiety was found to be strongly related to generalised anxiety and depression. As one of the first studies to explore both cognitive-emotional difficulties (rumination) and social functioning (ability to work and study), their findings highlighted that climate change anxiety is a multidimensional experience. However, Hogg et al. (2021) observed that this research measured participants' evaluation of their rumination about climate change rather than the nature of their rumination. Therefore, this research measured participants' self-evaluation of their distress rather than their emotional experience. Clayton and Karazsia suggested climate change anxiety may present a risk to mental health given its correlation with generalised anxiety disorder. However, adaptive responses were also found, such as behavioural responses and a sense of environmental identity, suggesting climate change anxiety may be a complex experience rather than an impairment.

2.4.2 *A Multifaceted Experience*

Eco-anxiety was reported by university student survey respondents to be a multifaceted psychological experience and, in part, distinct from generalised anxiety or depression (Hogg et al., 2021). Four factors explained 82% of the variance of survey data: 1) affective symptoms; 2) rumination on environmental events; 3) behavioural difficulties working, sleeping, or studying; and 4) anxiety about personal impact on the planet. These dimensions of eco-anxiety had varied and distinct patterns of association with three subscales: generalised anxiety, climate change belief, and belief in the credibility of science. For example, rumination and anxiety about personal impact on the planet did not directly relate to experiences of generalised anxiety. These two dimensions also appeared to be more stable over time (12 weeks) than affective symptoms and behavioural

dimensions of eco-anxiety. This was the first study to explore how affect relates to behavioural dimensions of eco-anxiety and to demonstrate eco-anxiety is distinct from COVID-19 related distress. Although mostly quantitative, the content analysis of open questions in this study prompted the researchers to broaden their initial affective and cognitive seven-item scale to also explore behavioural and social functioning. In this way, this study prioritised subjective experience in the subsequent development and validation of the Hogg Eco-Anxiety Scale (HEAS-13) to provide a reliable measure for eco-anxiety. Furthermore, the authors emphasised the spectrum of human experience and explicitly highlighted they did not support pathologising of this rational and multidimensional experience. The focus of this study was on the utility of HEAS-13 as a tool for mental health professionals to assess and monitor eco-anxiety within clinical populations, which could enable the assessment of therapeutic efficacy when working with severe eco-anxiety. Recently, Maibach and colleagues (2021, p.1) concluded health professionals' "greatest contribution" would be to help limit the pace of climate change. It is, therefore, unsurprising climate psychology research has adopted a singular focus on intervention rather than understanding the experience of eco-anxiety. As such, Hogg et al.'s study did not measure a broad spectrum of emotions to understand the full experience of eco-anxiety but instead conflated 'negative' and 'positive' emotions with the label "affective symptoms."

2.4.3 *A Spectrum of Emotions*

Australian survey data confirmed the presence of a spectrum of different responses to climate change, which included pleasant and energising emotions (Stanley et al., 2021). Structural equation modelling of survey responses explored differential impacts of 'eco-emotions' (e.g. eco-anxiety, eco-depression, eco-anger) on pro-environmental behaviours (PEBs) and mental health (measured as depression and stress), showing eco-anger not only predicted better mental health outcomes but also greater engagement in PEBs. Greater expressed eco-emotion was associated with more active engagement in PEBs overall. However, eco-anxiety was associated with fewer public PEBs (e.g. activism) and disengagement from the environmental movement. Eco-anxiety and eco-depression were described as less adaptive because they were associated with lower wellbeing, as measured by greater rates of depression, anxiety, and stress. The authors suggested that when eco-emotions were explored individually, pathology seemed to be implicated. However, when eco-emotions were explored in relation to each other, these relationships

appeared complex and not reducible to the simple categorisation of pathology or non-pathology. Anger was also highlighted as potentially enabling a uniquely adaptive response in cushioning the "debilitating psychological toll" of climate change (Stanley et al., 2021, p.6). This research suggested richer understanding beyond categorisation as 'adaptive' or 'maladaptive' might help illuminate interactions between each eco-emotion. Little is known about the relationship between anger and climate change or how participants identify with or embody anger. The authors suggested injustice can activate anger in people. Therefore, those who engage in public PEBs may engage due to high eco-anxiety and may become angrier as they learn more about climate change within the environmental movement. Although the literature suggests a positive correlation between wellbeing and PEBs (Whitmarsh, 2011), few authors have differentiated between public and private PEBs when researching the experience of eco-anxiety.

The link between action and psycho-social experience was further explored through a USA psychology student survey (Ballman, 2020), which showed public PEBs such as activism were correlated with high eco-anxiety, while private PEBs were correlated with low eco-anxiety. Therefore, literature suggesting any PEBs decrease eco-anxiety was not supported. Surprisingly, it was not behaviour but participants' relationship and connection to nature that served as the greatest predictor of eco-anxiety. Pro-environmental attitudes or a 'green identity' positively correlated with eco-anxiety and PEBs. Those reporting the highest level of eco-anxiety reported public PEBs. Therefore, Ballman speculated that those with low levels of nature relatedness might have been less motivated to change their lifestyle and break social norms by engaging in public PEBs. The nature of public PEB experiences, such as the success of efforts and group cohesion, may influence the experience of eco-anxiety among communities with high levels of nature relatedness. For example, hope, community, a sense of purpose, and peer support of public PEBs may be emotionally regulative and deepen the experience of eco-anxiety for those with high levels of nature relatedness, but not actually reduce eco-anxiety. Hogg et al. (2021) argued PEBs are not compelling dimensions of eco-anxiety and are separate constructs (Pihkala, 2018; Swim et al., 2009). Therefore, it could be argued we need to move from a behaviour-oriented understanding to value-focused research with people from communities where high levels of nature relatedness are the norm to understand the role values play in the experience of eco-anxiety.

2.4.4 *Beyond Behaviour to a Value-Focused Understanding*

In a stratified sample of 1538 Australians, survey respondents who reported higher personal identification with nature also reported higher levels of anxiety and depression (Dean et al., 2018). The authors suggested valuing nature may increase vulnerability to eco-anxiety. However, Clayton and Karazsia (2020) suggested a 'green' identity may promote wellbeing and provide protection from more difficult aspects of climate anxiety. Biospheric concern (e.g. concern for nature) was found to predict ecological stress levels (Helm et al., 2018). Ecological stress was used to denote emotional distress and anxiety about the future, which involved individuals feeling scared, sad, depressed, numb, helpless, hopeless, frustrated or angry (Fritze et al., 2008). Survey respondents (n=342 adults) with biospheric concern reported higher PEBs and depressive symptoms than those with either an egoistic focus on their wellbeing and quality of life or a social-altruistic concern for others and the next generation to come. This corroborated research findings that biospheric values are more closely related to pro-environmental beliefs, attitudes, and actions than other values. This is unsurprising given psychological adaptation strategies related to being in nature have been found to help overcome hopelessness and despair related to climate change (Fritze et al., 2008), especially for those who highly value nature. Therefore, higher biospheric concern and resultant increased stress about climate change may be contained by meaningful coping strategies (Homburg et al., 2007; Ojala, 2007, 2013). These findings suggest the specific values underpinning climate change concern are important in the experience of wellbeing when facing climate change. This research was one of the first studies to address the relationship between eco-anxiety and values and thus introduced bidirectional complexity into the 'ecological stress versus coping' focus that had previously dominated eco-anxiety literature (Homburg et al., 2007).

Depressive symptoms were perceived to lead individuals to withdraw from social interactions and engagement with problems (Gotlib & Joormann, 2010). Therefore, Helm et al. (2018) conceptualized depressive symptoms as a 'maladaptive response'. Although not pathologized, understanding of ecological stress was categorised by Helm et al. with binary positive and negative terms. Building on research about why eco-anxiety might be associated with both maladaptive and adaptive responses, Verplanken et al. (2020) researched worry as a key facet of eco-anxiety. Adult survey data in the USA and Europe highlighted habitual worry about global warming was unrelated to 'pathological worry' and included both 'positive' and 'negative' emotions. 'Global warming worry' was

associated with perceiving the impacts of climate change as personal and proximal, having values for PEBs, and a pro-environmental self-identity. This supported research that suggests experiences of worry and grief can occur when it is apparent that places or objects of care are being devalued or destroyed (Wang et al., 2018). The latter can range from our homes or valued outdoor spaces, to core beliefs and sense of self (Ellis & Albrecht, 2017; Norgaard, 2011), to one's lifestyle or cultural practices (Adger et al., 2013; Cunsolo & Ellis, 2018). Repeated surveys found levels of 'global warming worry' were independent of COVID-19 (Verplanken et al., 2020). For most participants, Verplanken et al. (2020) found 'global warming worry' was a constructive form of thinking associated with personally meaningful values and found to accompany positive states such as optimism, interest, and hope. This was supported by research exploring meaning-focused coping among 'climate anxious' children (Ojala, 2013).

Ojala's (2012) research suggested expressing both 'negative' and 'positive' emotions such as anxiety, anger and determination may be positively associated with constructive coping and PEBs. Value-oriented coping seemed to support people in overcoming deep feelings of depression and despair about global threats outside their control (Homburg et al., 2007). Embracing the personal relevance of climate change to one's self-concept may be an important enabler of 'constructive eco-anxiety'. Verplanken et al. (2020) suggested this could mean a 'green identity' acts as a cognitive/affective core, driving pro-environmental aspirations and behaviour. Therefore, 'waking up' to climate change may become part of individuals' 'true self' and promote personal growth (Verplanken & Holland, 2002; Verplanken & Sui, 2019). Verplanken et al. (2020) suggested the causal flow of an affective, cognitive, and self-related model may be bidirectional, so a 'green identity' is strengthened through actions congruent with pro-environmental values and is also fuelled by determination, anxiety, and anger about climate change. Verplanken et al. (2020) also suggested those struggling with clinical levels of anxiety may be less equipped to cope with 'global warming worry'. It may be that with suitable support, distress about climate change could become a constructive, motivational, and energising force associated with pro-environmental attitudes and actions (Bissing-Olson et al., 2016; Reser & Swim, 2011; Verplanken & Roy, 2013). However, further research is needed to understand how people might develop their intrapersonal functioning, so they are able to experience 'global warming worry' as a constructive, self-affirming experience.

Survey respondents in a mixed-methods study who reported high eco-anxiety (n=52 of 114) rated their connection to nature as 'very important' for their mental health (Kelly,

2017). Content analysis of interviews (n=14) with students and academics at Colorado University revealed different emotions of eco-anxiety served different processes: sadness and grief were related to human suffering resulting from climate change, whereas anxiety was related to thinking about 'future instability'. One participant suggested therapists support people to learn mindful self-compassionate acceptance of their 'negative feelings' so they can learn from them. The focus of the research was not eco-anxiety reduction but instead exploration of personal experience to learn from those living with conscious awareness of the climate crisis and the appropriate and understandable emotions activated by this awareness (such as fear, grief, and anger). This research supported the writing of Pihkala (2019) and Stoknes (2015), who warned that while acting on eco-anxiety may aid mental and emotional coping, overemphasis on action, motivated by intolerance of uncomfortable feelings or a culture of 'uncare' or 'invalidation', is unhelpful. Group support was emphasised by participants as helping reduce loneliness and providing an experience of being heard and discovering others feel similarly. Further research to explore the rich descriptions reported by this thesis study would benefit from a methodology that does not require pre-defined criterion of eco-anxiety experience, which may have limited the depth and breadth of understanding of eco-anxiety gleaned from interview data. Research is needed to explore how group support and practising self-compassion can support coping with reported persistent feelings of 'despair' and 'overwhelm' about the climate crisis. Therefore, an in-depth consideration of both 'positive' and 'negative' aspects of experiencing eco-anxiety within the context of intrapersonal support would be an important contribution to the literature. Without the qualitative exploration of subjective experiencing, understanding of eco-anxiety may be reduced to a set of behaviours, and a focus on pathology will continue to distract us from understanding the complexity of this experience (Clayton & Manning, 2018).

2.5 Qualitative Research on Eco-Anxiety in the Context of Support

2.5.1 *Being with Eco-Anxiety in Therapy*

Counselling psychologist Martin Milton (2017) described an example of therapy with a client whose experience of anxiety, guilt, and grief in response to the climate crisis led to them feeling powerless to honour or be with these feelings. Developing awareness of our interconnectedness with nature was described as key to developing the capacity to face

pain with self-awareness. Ecopsychology was integrated into therapy by conducting sessions outside while walking in a park that provided an appropriate therapeutic space. Changing the therapeutic frame in this way was only appropriate following comprehensive personal and professional reflection by the therapist about their own environmental identity, understanding of climate change, and own understanding of eco-psychological theory (Doherty, 2015). Similarly, Buzzell and Chalquist (2010) stated the best initial response to eco-anxiety is deep listening with an "open mind and heart" (p. 3), which does not unknowingly undermine the experience, worldviews, or emotions of a person's eco-anxiety about threats to the planet we call home, and where they live. Rather than avoiding the difficult feelings, we must be gentle towards our human vulnerability and respectfully work through our psychological processes with care so we can learn from them (Weintrobe, 2021). Case studies about supporting adults experiencing eco-anxiety have provided rich data, albeit limited in rigour, about the challenging experience of 'being with' eco-anxiety due to the vast and political nature of climate change threats (Bednarek, 2020) and the difficulty of understanding the psychosocial processes activated by eco-anxiety (Rust, 2020).

A survey of mental health professionals (n=158) reported 50% had experienced clients mentioning climate change in therapy along with expressions of anxiety, fear, and grief. However, only half of those professionals felt supported and prepared to work with clients' eco-anxiety (Seaman, 2016). Therapists interviewed reported the topic of climate change activated feelings of fear, anxiety, anger and/or sadness in themselves during therapy sessions, and several talked about feeling the need to manage their own personal emotions about climate change to facilitate sufficient care for their clients. Climate change-related conversations seemed to affect the quality of the therapeutic relationship itself. Seventeen per cent of mental health professionals did not consider their clients' responses to climate change as healthy and appropriate; two respondents even considered clients' responses pathological and delusional, and several felt clients' responses were exaggerated. Client emotions related to climate change were identified as anxiety (32.1%), anger (14.6%), ambivalence (6.6%) and 22.6% reported being 'unsure' what emotions their clients had expressed in therapy. Thematic analysis of interviews with 35 therapists about the main difficulties of working with eco-anxiety yielded five themes: politics, anxiety about the future, powerlessness, inconvenience of lifestyle changes, and concern for vulnerable people. This thesis study, though based in Australia, yielded results that resonate with experiences of a UK based working group for psychology

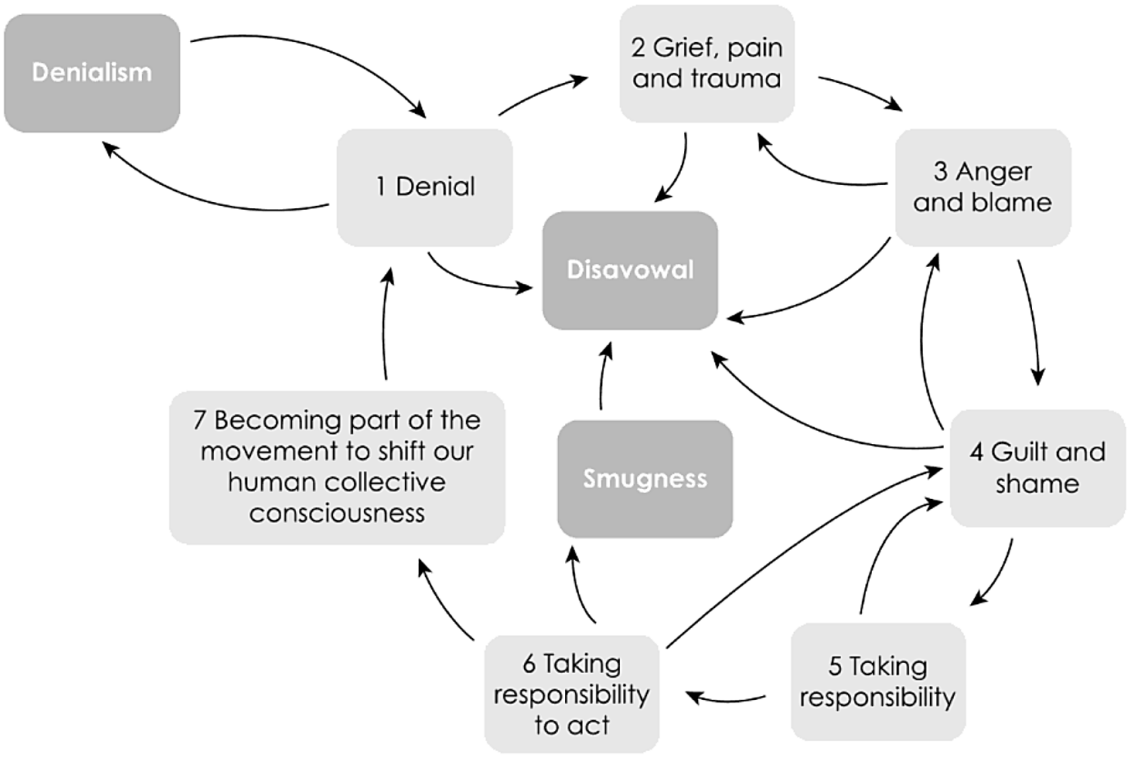
professionals, Climate Psychology Alliance (2021), which has reportedly experienced high demand for therapeutic support (Staunton & Hickman, 2019). One of the working group members, psychotherapist Caroline Hickman, urged therapists to explore their own feelings about climate change before 'jumping into' intervening with clients' eco-anxiety (Hickman, 2020). Hickman's interviews with people in the Maldives, Nigeria, and Bangladesh about their experiences of eco-anxiety highlighted how helpful learning and insight could be gained from first listening to the human experience of living on 'a suffering planet' (Hickman, 2020). Similarly, Hawkins and Ryde (2019) argued therapists are obligated to work through their personal cycle of responses to the climate crisis to build the conscious awareness and understanding needed to support clients through this process.

A recent interview study explored the subjective experience of ten psychotherapy clients in Sweden, addressing their climate concern in therapy (Budziszewska & Jonsson, 2021). Semi-structured interviews yielded detailed responses that were analysed phenomenologically and mapped to Spinelli's (2015) existential themes of existence model. Following rigorous and reflexive analysis of interview transcripts, the researchers concluded climate anxiety should not be minimised or pathologized by therapists. Climate anxiety was found to be "awakened" through learning that involved experiencing mortal dread, fear, overwhelm, and hopelessness. The researchers highlighted the value of therapists promoting social support and a community focus to reduce isolation and loneliness and the importance of remaining active in the face of real threats to wellbeing. The socially embedded nature of participants' experiences prompted researchers to encourage therapists to hold in mind the social context of climate anxiety and to promote ethical activism to support clients' connection and reciprocal relationships with humans and natural ecosystems. These findings align with theoretical models recently developed in the UK, although these have not yet been researched in-depth. For example, Hawkins and Ryde (2019) provided a model (Figure 3) based on the writing of key climate psychology theorists (Joanna Macy, James Hillman, Sally Weintrobe and Donna Orange) and research on waking up to racism (Ryde, 2019) to offer a map for building climate consciousness when "full awareness hurts" (Sewall, 1995, p.202). Similarly, van der Linden (2014) proposed a model showing reciprocal relationships between subjective experience, emotion and threat perception related to climate change. Despite emerging research documenting psychologists' work with eco-anxiety (Doherty, 2015; Jordan & Marshall, 2010) and theoretical models of emotional responses to climate change, there

is a lack of qualitative research elevating the voices of UK adults who have sought therapeutic support for their eco-anxiety.

Figure 3

The Ecological Awareness Cycle with Retrogressive Flows



Note: This diagram summarised the hypothesised cyclical psychological processes involved in becoming conscious of the climate crisis. From "*Integrative Psychotherapy in Theory and Practice: A Relational, Systemic and Ecological Approach*." (p.192), by P. Hawkins and J. Ryde, 2019, Jessica Kingsley Publishers. Copyright 2019 by Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

2.5.2 *Being with Eco-Anxiety in Therapeutic Groups*

An informal feedback study of a WTR group (Macy & Johnstone, 2012) reported a positive experience for 90% of participants (Johnstone, 2019). The group reportedly helped strengthen participants' sense of connection with the world and feelings they could make a difference. Participants highlighted two significant aspects of the group experience: not being alone in feeling distress for the world and having this distress validated as an appropriate emotional response, which helped them to feel grief, hate, and rage. No participant reported experiencing trauma or depression related to the state of the world as a result of the group. One participant did report that the group was paradoxically 'very deeply' harmful and 'very deeply' healing for them personally (p.9). Any negative feedback offered by participants indicated their participation activated awareness of

personal issues and challenges related to being in a group. This study lacked rigour and scale but prompted further research to explore the psychosocial processes of 'eco-anxiety' in relation to WTR groups.

For example, a case study illustrating the benefits, challenges, and limitations of transformative learning processes employed in WTR groups was provided by Hathaway (2016) based on the reflective essays of 13 participants. Two group aspects were highlighted. Firstly, the practice of gratitude was highlighted as helping to minimise defensiveness, build ecological concern more gradually, and move beyond "the despair of our current condition" (O'Sullivan & Taylor, 2004, p.3). This was found to be especially helpful for participants who had not previously reflected on their responses to climate change. Secondly, the experience of grief was aided by supportive group processes engaging the mind, emotions, imagination, and body. For example, breath work and eye contact exercises helped highlight participants' interconnectedness with the world, each other, and their emotions. A sense of community empowered participants to experience their emotions more fully and work through painful feelings towards a shift in consciousness and deepening of connection with each other. It would be helpful for this case study to be built on with in-depth research into the individual experience of eco-anxiety beyond participation in these groups.

A larger-scale feedback study into climate change beliefs, values, environmental attitudes, and behaviour change of participants from 'Carbon Conversations' groups was carried out by UK environmental social scientists (Büchs et al., 2015). Emotions seemed to mediate how participants reflected on and shared their inner conflicts related to climate change and private PEBs. 'Bottom up' coding of semi-structured interviews with facilitators (n=17) and participants (n=26) revealed learning about climate change activated painful feelings, but greater emotional engagement correlated with greater PEBs. Climate change information that induced feelings was ineffective in prompting reflection if participants were not given room to express and discuss their responses. Facing concerns with like-minded people allowed participants to grieve and reinforced their resolve to act according to their values. Giving attention to inner conflicts linked to personal identities and values was found to be essential to PEBs. Further research is needed to understand how conscious awareness and emotional experiencing of the climate crisis was maintained, if at all, following participation. This remains unexplored amidst the PEB focus of existing research. Such research would require a qualitative approach that develops a deeper understanding of personal experience for this under-

researched topic. This would contrast with most existing literature on 'eco-anxiety' that ascribes to a positivist epistemology.

2.6 Epistemological Positioning of The Research Base

Within a positivist paradigm, researchers attempt to uncover generalisable truths that exist in 'the real world', which are objectively examined as empirically independent of the researcher and participant views (Willig & Stainton-Rogers, 2017). In this way, distress about climate change is more easily located within individuals as an internal struggle rather than as a healthy response to be respectfully explored and learned from. Most studies on mental health impacts of climate change and the understanding of eco-anxiety have adopted a realist ontological position in which participants are viewed as self-contained individuals (Douglas et al., 2016), separate from each other, social systems, and the natural world (Higley & Milton, 2008; Stolorow & Atwood, 2002). Therefore, it is not surprising that such research often promotes intervention to reduce levels of climate-related distress rather than first seeking an in-depth understanding of the experience. Investigation into individuals' wide-ranging responses to psychological distress has so far prioritised individual action over personal experience (Chukwuorji et al., 2017; Kundzewicz et al., 2020). In fact, rather than the experience of eco-anxiety itself, most research has focused on the mediating role of emotion in turning knowledge into action; behavioural responses to climate change; and the avoidance or denial of climate change (Carmi et al., 2015; Nabi et al., 2018; Tollemache, 2018). Without an understanding of eco-anxiety based upon individuals' in-depth accounts, which can capture the social and political issues constructing their experience, our knowledge of eco-anxiety risks being limited to a set of observable behaviours, being 'othered', or unintentionally pathologized (Bednarek, 2019, 2020).

2.7 What this Research Seeks to Address

Existing literature includes reports on mental health impacts resulting from climate change (Albrecht, 2011; Hayes et al., 2019); models and definitions of eco-anxiety (Coyle & Van Susteren, 2012; Pihkala, 2018); and guidance for resilience and therapeutic support (Davenport, 2017; Randall, 2009; Rust, 2004; Weintrobe, 2013). Psychologists (Gifford, 2008) and counselling psychologists (Gimalova, & Milton, 2019) have been urged to help explore the psychological impacts of climate change on wellbeing (Hogg et al., 2021). In

comparison to global research efforts, the emerging body of 'eco-anxiety' literature is particularly small within the UK (Ingle & Jafry, 2019). It has been suggested the apparent lack of interest could be a result of the mainstream psychology view that humans are rational and the subsequent tendency to interiorize that which is mental and exteriorize that which is natural or contextual as if they are unconnected (Fisher, 2013). As counselling psychologists, our priority is relationships. However, our relationship with our environment and its significance to the welfare of humankind has arguably been neglected (Higley & Milton, 2008).

Research to date has provided a wealth of understanding into theories of denial and emotional avoidance of eco-anxiety (Jacques, 2012; Norgaard, 2011; Tollemache, 2018), resulting from the inherent challenges of 'being with' contextual phenomena underpinned by expansive, global, and politically charged subject matter, with simultaneously significant and obscure impacts (Brick & van der Linden, 2018). Research has indicated a spectrum of psychological states related to eco-anxiety (such as hopelessness, overwhelm and powerlessness) can negatively impact wellbeing and can be challenging to 'be with', given the political and complex nature of climate change (Seaman, 2016). The political context of eco-anxiety exists because meaningful responses to climate change, such as those advocated in the UK's Climate and Ecology Bill, would necessitate significant changes to the way we live in the UK (United Nations Environment Programme, 2020; Weintrobe, 2021). The political context of eco-anxiety seems to be an intensifying influence on client distress and acts as a barrier to therapeutic support when political figures are perceived to discount the severity of the climate crisis (Ma et al., 2019).

Exploring the value of distress and challenging the stigmatisation of those experiencing eco-anxiety is central to the humanistic practice of counselling psychology (Ivey & Collins, 2003). Therefore, this research aims to contribute to theory and clinical practice a deeper understanding of the subjective experience of eco-anxiety of adults who have engaged in ecopsychology based support by applying CGT to their expressed values, experience, and meaning related to eco-anxiety.

Existing research has not constructed a theoretical understanding that considers the environmental, social, and political contexts that have contributed to participants' worldviews. Participants in research to date did not report having a 'shared experience' or access to a support group for their eco-anxiety, so it is difficult to ascertain the

homogeneity of each group involved, and more importantly, what personal relevance or meaningfulness eco-anxiety held for them (e.g. Ballman, 2020; Hogg et al., 2021; Stanley et al., 2021). Existing literature lacks the personal perspectives of individuals who have experienced support to 'be with' their eco-anxiety. Understanding the process of how eco-anxiety is experienced by individuals who have attended an ecopsychology support group is important for three reasons. Firstly, ecopsychology support groups focus on building the emotional capacity to 'be with' eco-anxiety (Rust, 2020). Participants are, therefore, likely to have reflected upon their eco-anxiety and therefore be able to provide detailed descriptions of their understanding and experience (Hathaway, 2016; Rust, 2020). Secondly, ten of the fourteen studies included in the literature review highlighted the importance of nature relatedness in the experience of eco-anxiety. Whether this is an outcome or antecedent to the experience of eco-anxiety, it seems this is a value that is important to explore. Thirdly, this research is aligned with counselling psychologists who argue we have much to learn from individuals who have spent time in ecopsychology support groups, deepening their relationship to their environmental, social and political context, and building emotional capacity for psychological distress (Surgenor, 2013) in order to be awake to a "defining issue of our time" (Mitchell, 2019, p.1).

3 Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1 Chapter Three Overview

This chapter outlines the epistemological position of the research, the rationale for methodological choices made, the features of the CGT method employed, and details of the analytic process.

3.2 Purpose of the Research

This research seeks to promote dialogue with extant theory and respond to the paucity of research about the subjective experience of eco-anxiety and working with psychological distress that is embodied in the global context of uncertainty and climate crisis.

3.2.1 *Research Question*

What is the experience of eco-anxiety for individuals who have been through an ecopsychology support group for facing the climate crisis?

3.3 Epistemology

3.3.1 *Epistemological and Ontological Position*

The research aim was to co-construct a theory, relevant to counselling psychologist practice, of the experience eco-anxiety of members of the UK public, who have attended an ecopsychology support group for facing the climate crisis run by psychologists or psychotherapists. This aim complemented the epistemological position of moderate social constructionism (mSC) and constructivist grounded theory (CGT) methodology (Willig & Stainton-Rogers, 2017). In contrast to constructivists who consider personal perception as individually constructed, social constructionists (SC) suggest that understanding, perceptions and experiences are shaped through social, historical, cultural, moral, ideological and political contexts (Nightingale & Cromby, 1999). Moderate social constructionism (mSC) takes the contexualised position of setting individual interpretations in context a step further by acknowledging that constructions differ in social power (Harper & Thompson, 2011). In this way, mSC adopts a "contextualised and dynamic approach" (p. 78) that explores social processes and maps relationships

involved in an experience1 to fully explore the socially constructed cognitions, emotions, values and personal experiences that make up a person's inner world (Willig, 2013). Understanding of psychosocial processes is sought "from the inside out" (Charmaz, 1995, p.30-31) to reveal the socially and culturally embedded narratives that facilitate discussion and meaning construction around the subjective experience of interest (Harper & Thompson, 2011). Rather than elucidate a permanent reality or the essence of a phenomenon, mSC explores how experience is constructed via social and local processes through culturally shared categories of meaning, resources, and materials (Harper & Thompson, 2011).

My critical realist position locates my ontological stance on the continuum between realist and relativist perspectives (Willig & Stainton-Rogers, 2017), where I ascribe to a degree of relativism within the paradigm of social constructionism. Critical realism has a close affinity to an mSC epistemology (Willig, 2016) because it acknowledges that people interpret the world differently, and the object of interpretation (e.g. eco-anxiety) can correspond to something of independent ontological status (e.g. a change in global temperature) (Andrews, 2012). Thus, I acknowledge that 'real world' realities exist (Charmaz, 2000; Madill et al., 2010; Nightingale & Cromby, 1999; Willig, 2013, 2016). Extra-discursive elements such as materialistic settings, institutional structures, and governmental policies related to climate change produce a context that forms personal and social constraints impacting the meaning-making and actions of participants (Gergen, 1999, 2001). Epistemologically, I recognise that knowledge is both local and provisional (Madill et al., 2010), and any realist attempt to 'directly access' an experience, isolated from its social, historical, political context, is impossible (Willig, 2016). However, I also acknowledge that subjective experience and meaning-making are socially constructed within an 'external reality' (Crotty, 1998; Elder-Vass, 2012). For this reason, it is important to acknowledge one of the limitations of this study. The current study sought

1 Please note, use of the word 'experience' denotes a psychosocial and relational process not an act of the socially isolated mind, 'driven' by an inner world (Gergen, 1999).

to construct a theoretical understanding of eco-anxiety, a co-construction of the researcher and participants, and not a generalisable or representative model.

3.3.2 *Rationale for Using Constructivist Grounded Theory*

Phenomenological methods were considered due to their experiential focus but not selected for two reasons. Firstly, phenomenological approaches seek to explore an experience's essence, preferably with an established research base (Harper & Thompson, 2011). At the time of writing, eco-anxiety literature has only recently emerged with very little in-depth exploration. Secondly, the aims of the research were to understand the process of how eco-anxiety occurs as opposed to simply what the experience is like. Similarly, language-based methods (Crossley, 2000; Wetherell et al., 2001) were considered but not selected because the research did not seek to understand how eco-anxiety was linguistically constructed or how it relates to participants' life stories or personal identity. The current study sought to respond to the gap in the literature by contributing a theoretical understanding of eco-anxiety.

Grounded theory was chosen because it aligned with the research aims to understand the psychosocial processes of eco-anxiety by going beyond rich description to produce theory grounded in participants' experience. This data-driven approach to developing theory offered the "flexibility and sensitivity to be responsive to changing contexts and constructs" (p.134) inherent to working with the understudied and "under-defined" topic (Tweed & Charmaz, 2012, p,134) of eco-anxiety. GT facilitates anchoring data in context and thereby avoids attending only to the level of the individual mind (Craps, 2013) that could leave unquestioned the socio-political conditions that elicited the experience in the first place (Barnwell et al., 2020). There are three main forms of GT; the traditional method, a more structured approach, and a constructivist approach (Charmaz, 2014). The CGT approach outlined by Kathy Charmaz (2016) was chosen because it was consistent with my mSC epistemological position (Willig & Stainton-Rogers, 2017) and acknowledges the researcher's contribution throughout the methodological decision making, data gathering and analysis. In this way, CGT supports a central value of Counselling Psychology, which is to consider and scrutinise psychologists' role in the construction of data and meaning by reflecting upon their position, perspectives, and interactions (Fassinger, 2005). Fassinger (2005) urged counselling psychologists to use the methodological exemplar of the scientific-practitioner model. As a trainee counselling psychologist, the skills employed in CGT research were complementary to my training

because of CGT's goal to integrate theory with practice through the co-construction of understanding of lived experience.

3.4 Sampling

3.4.1 *Inclusion Criteria*

This study aimed to recruit a non-clinical sample of 10 to 14 adults of either gender.

Inclusion criteria were:

- Had experienced an ecopsychology support group focused on facing the climate crisis in the last 18 months;
- Self-reported experiencing and living with eco-anxiety for at least two years;
- Self-reported feeling able to provide detailed descriptions of their experience of eco-anxiety;
- Could access a computer and the internet.

Exclusion criteria were:

- Currently engaged in NHS therapy;
- Current symptoms of psychosis or suicidal ideation;
- Need for an interpreter,
- Not UK based;
- Had facilitated a WTR group or attended WTR groups more than twice;
- Know the researcher personally.

Prospective participants were informed of the inclusion and exclusion criteria prior to consenting to take part in the study and the screening process.

3.4.2 *Recruitment*

Five accredited (HCPC, BABCP, EAP, or UKCP) psychologists and psychotherapists who facilitated WTR groups in the UK between January 2019 and June 2020 emailed an advert of the proposed study to participants that attended their groups (See Appendix B). Initially, the aim was to interview participants from WTR groups facilitated by counselling psychologists. However, participants from groups led by other accredited mental health professionals were also approached to enable broader access to

participation and therefore align with the tenet of counselling psychology to value learning from and working with other disciplines. Prospective participants who emailed me in response to the research advert were informed of the aims and procedures of the study by email (see Appendix C) and offered to consent to a telephone call (see Appendix D) to review the aims and inclusion criteria of the study (see Appendix E).

When COVID-19 lockdown measures began, recruitment became more challenging because WTR groups were cancelled, effectively reducing the sample population size with each passing week. I also received feedback from psychologists who had previously run groups that the term "eco-anxiety" was discouraging participation because this concept was associated with delegitimising and disregarding the very experience I was seeking to explore (Belyani, & Marshall, 2020). Therefore, I drew from Shullman's (2017) learning leadership approach to better hold participants in mind by making communication of the project more empowering and inclusive with less psychological language (Tribe, & Morrissey, 2020). I constructed a webpage to host a video of myself talking about participation to explain the reasons for using the contentious label of 'eco-anxiety'. I also asked each prospective participant about their feelings towards the wording 'eco-anxiety' to discuss any concerns they might have about participation. These conversations seemed to build rapport and helped ensure informed consent for the interview (see Appendix F). Participants were recruited from four WTR participant groups run by three different psychotherapists and one clinical psychologist. The first seven participants were recruited using purposive methods and shared a broad range of understanding and experiences of eco-anxiety. The final six interviewees yielded more specific data via theoretical sampling methods (Charmaz, 2014; Cutcliffe, 2000).

3.4.3 *Participants*

Thirteen participants were interviewed over a six-month period (See Table 2). To protect confidentiality, only pseudonyms and broad demographic information were recorded. All participants were white, aged between late-twenties and late-sixties.

Table 2
Characteristics of Participants Recruited from WTR Groups

Pt.	Pseudonym	Age group	Gender	Ethnicity	Occupation	Higher Education	Parent
1	Rowan	50s	F	White British	Charity manager	Undergraduate Degree	Yes

Pt.	Pseudonym	Age group	Gender	Ethnicity	Occupation	Higher Education	Parent
2	Beech	30s	F	White British	Community gardener	No	No
3	Linden	30s	F	White British Australian	Lawyer	Undergraduate Degree	No
4	Birch	30s	F	Mixed White British and Chinese	Charity Worker	Undergraduate Degree, Post Graduate Diploma	No
5	Oak	30s	F	White British	Occupational Therapist & NHS Manager of Inpatient Mental Health Service	Undergraduate Degree, Masters Degree	No
6	Pine	50s	M	White British	Construction Worker	No	Yes
7	Willow	50s	M	White British	Window Cleaner	No	Yes
8	Yew	60s	M	White British	Retired Social Worker	Undergraduate Degree	Yes
9	Hawthorne	50s	M	White British	Retired Teacher	Undergraduate Degree	No
10	Maple	40s	F	White British	Clinical Psychologist	Doctorate	No
11	Juniper	60s	F	White British	Psychotherapist	Undergraduate Degree	Yes
12	Hazel	40s	F	White British	Counselling Psychologist	Doctorate	Yes
13	Acacia	20s	F	White British	Environmental Charity Worker	Undergraduate Degree, Masters Degree	No

3.5 Data Gathering

Due to COVID-19 social distancing measures, interviews were conducted online using Microsoft Teams in confidential rooms available to participants and the researcher. Interviews were video-recorded and transcribed. When internet connectivity failed, interviews were completed by telephone because grounded theorists (Ward et al., 2015) have argued this is as effective as video. Semi-structured interviews using open-ended questions facilitated free-flowing, spontaneous responses that encouraged participants to tell their stories and answer the research question in their own words (Fassinger, 2005). Two primary questions were used: “Please tell me about your personal experience of eco-anxiety?” and “What else do you feel might be important to you about your experience?”.

Over the course of data collection, interview questions progressively focused more on discerning the nuances of the key processes in the data as analytic gaps in the emerging theory became clear (Timonen et al., 2018).

Unfortunately, the most up-to-date interview guidance available (Bryant & Charmaz, 2019; Charmaz & Thornberg, 2020) did not mention the use of online video conferencing technology. Participants reported no noticeable difference to the experience as most social interactions at the time of interviews had to be conducted online in accordance with COVID-19 guidelines. According to Al-Yateem (2012), however, video recording interviews can elicit more formal and less informative responses. Therefore, I followed GT interview recommendations to prioritise participants' wellbeing and ensuring they felt heard, above eliciting the data I was seeking. As a result, the semi-structured interviews were relatively less structured and more informal than had they been conducted in-person to overcome the difficulties of online research in following participants' major concerns and perspectives (Wimpenny & Gass, 2000). Rather than explicitly prompting specific examples, I found Charmaz's (2014) practical suggestion of regularly offering participants paraphrased summaries effective in checking understanding and, more importantly, validating participants' narratives. When I avoided being too directive, which is common to inexperienced interviewers (Wimpenny & Gass, 2000), participants' answers became more personal and richly detailed (Timonen et al., 2018).

At the end of each interview, participants were invited to reflect on their experience of sharing and if there were any important areas that had not been addressed. The average duration of interviews was 80 minutes. However, interviews online required more pre-interview time with participants to complete consent forms, ensure they had the opportunity to ask questions and could access the link to Microsoft Teams. Online participation was, therefore, more convenient to attend but more time-consuming. As no data was withheld from participants, it was deemed more ethical to carry out a full debriefing after the interview date so that we did not breach the 90 minutes time commitment and also gave participants time to digest the information shared during the interview (See Appendix G) (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2020). During debrief conversations, participants were thanked for participating, reminded of their right to withdraw their data, encouraged to read the debrief letter (See Appendix H) with more information on contact services to access support for eco-anxiety, given the opportunity to ask questions and reminded of how their data will contribute to the aims of the research. All participants gave positive feedback of their experience and opted in to be contacted

about further involvement in the study to provide further clarity and actively engage in theory co-construction. Participants were given a summary of their transcript, initial thoughts on how their interview fit the overall theoretical 'story' and a summary of analysis. As a result, two participants gave written feedback, and seven participants participated in follow-up interviews. As a result, several changes were made to focused codes and theory construction. No financial incentives were provided.

3.6 Analytic Process

Analysis began with transcription of each interview, followed by line-by-line coding of the transcript within four days of the interview. To ensure ongoing reflexivity, memos were recorded immediately after each interview and throughout the transcription and line by line coding processes. Line by line codes were then merged to produce initial codes and then focused codes through an iterative coding process using hand-written notes and structured lists recorded in Microsoft Excel, which were then subsequently stored and processed in ATLAS.ti qualitative data analysis software for further analysis. Focused codes were then mapped onto the four seasons and were progressively revised, merged, and better defined as transcripts were read continuously throughout the analytic process. Theoretical sampling allowed new data to address gaps and unanswered questions in theoretical construction. Interview summaries and unanswered questions were provided to each participant prior to follow-up interviews, where analytic findings were discussed to ensure the iterative process of CGT had developed sufficient conceptual and theoretical construction.

3.6.1 *Initial Coding*

Interviews were transcribed verbatim, and paralinguistic notes on body language, tone and emotional expression were added to ensure a detailed account of subjective experience was captured (Charmaz, 2000). Reflections on the interpersonal process were also recorded (Timonen et al., 2018). In accordance with CGT (Charmaz, 2014), analysis began with iterative coding (short, specific, and descriptive labels) of each line of data using gerunds to identify active processes within the data. Line-by-line coding was chosen to ensure a depth of analysis that could achieve sufficient conceptual clarity (Timonen et al., 2018) and compensate for the loss of breadth of data that would otherwise be achieved through several cycles of recruitment (Willig & Stainton-Rogers, 2017).

However, coding each line based on the row length of transcript text seemed like an arbitrary 'unit of meaning'. Therefore, when a code could not be found within a single line, I included the next line. This approach enabled me to stay close to the data while preventing uncritical synthesis of participants' worldviews (Charmaz, 2014). The 'constant comparative' method was employed through the identification of similarities and differences within single interviews and across interview transcripts (Mills et al., 2006; Willig & Stainton-Rogers, 2017). CGT analysis was non-linear, iterative and recursive (Chun Tie et al., 2019). The use of software to facilitate the process of coding is debated by grounded theorists as it can distance the researcher from the nuanced interpretative process and has "little to do with the highly creative process of analysis" (Timonen et al., 2018, p.8). However, as the number of codes increased beyond 3000, it became necessary to use software (ATLAS.ti) (Bryant & Charmaz, 2019; Timonen et al., 2018) to aid data management and retrieval of an otherwise unmanageably large dataset. All memo-writing and diagramming of analysis remained handwritten to ensure the immersive analytic process followed the creative impetus essential to the nuanced interpretative process (Charmaz, 2014; Timonen et al., 2018).

3.6.2 *Focused Coding*

Focused codes were constructed from similarly orientated, 'frequent' or 'significant' codes (Charmaz, 2014). Focusing only on the frequency of codes seemed positivist and incongruent with the epistemological stance of mSC. Instead, identifying significant codes whilst being mindful of code groundedness (number of times mentioned and number of interviewees who mentioned that code) and density (number of closely related codes) seemed more epistemologically aligned. Theoretical sensitivity, which is the ability to discern significant data segments important to theory, was heightened through immersive reading and re-reading of data (Hoare et al., 2012). Through extensive memo-writing, 'what' and 'who' positioned certain codes as 'significant' was explored. I remained tentative in making connections between focused codes and emerging categories (Charmaz, 2014). The concurrent process of interviewing alongside analysis allowed me to further confirm or disconfirm analytic ideas. Focused codes that did not complement existing categories prompted a recursive process of questioning, construction and deconstruction (Timonen et al., 2018). When participants did not seem to agree, priority was given to the views of participants who reported less academic experience to elevate the voices of those who might otherwise not be presenced within

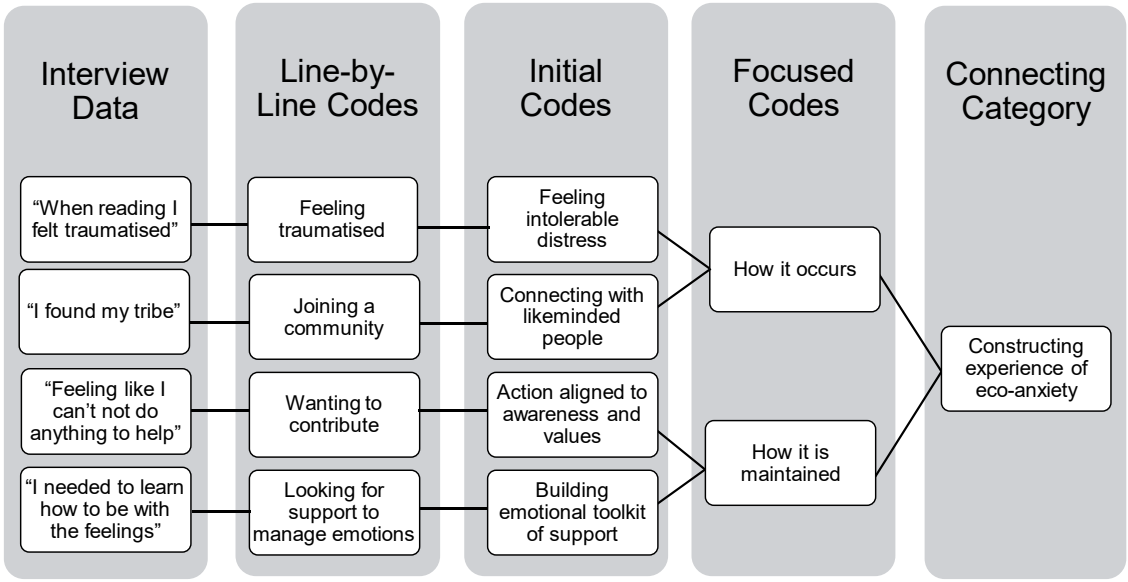
academic theory, and to align with the social justice values of counselling psychology. Follow-up interviews helped clarify the significance of categories and shaped construction or deconstruction of these accordingly (Breckenridge et al., 2012).

3.6.3 *Theoretical Sampling*

According to Timonen et al. (2018), sampling in pursuit of theory is the "gold standard" of GT research because categories are elaborated and defined through increasingly refined data collection following the adoption of narrower inclusion criteria (Charmaz, 2014). Theoretical sampling occurred following the focused coding of seven interviews. Theoretical sampling became necessary when several emerging categories about *how eco-anxiety is maintained* warranted further investigation to sufficiently develop their concepts. Inclusion criteria were therefore reduced to participants who reported having over two years of experience of eco-anxiety who could help inform gaps in the emerging theory (see Appendix I). Maintaining processes of eco-anxiety related to the role of grief, close relationships and emotional intelligence were explored. Instead of simply increasing my dataset (Breckenridge & Jones, 2009), theoretical sampling required going back and forth through the data to deepen insight towards theoretical construction (Timonen et al., 2018). To avoid theoretical sampling prematurely shutting down important theoretical directions (Charmaz, 2014), I remained open to unexpected concepts that emerged (Timonen et al., 2018) throughout the theoretical construction of the psychosocial process of eco-anxiety (see Figure 4 For an illustration of coding and theoretical construction).

Figure 4

Illustration of Coding and Theoretical Construction



3.6.4 *Theory Construction*

Constructing a core category is argued as central to rigorous GT research (Breckenridge et al., 2012). However, a key tenet of CGT is allowing for the multiple truths and perspectives to "elucidate all the component parts of the process" and not just the nature of eco-anxiety as one category (Timonen et al., 2018, p.8). Therefore, I avoided arriving at a core category prematurely by iteratively developing categories around core concepts by continually returning to the data and interview questions. Therefore, my analysis pursued refinement of the full storyline of theory through engagement with the data (Chun Tie et al., 2019).

3.6.5 *Iterative Process of Analysis*

The decision of when to conclude analysis was challenging as each interview generated fresh viewpoints and new inspiration for analysis (Dey, 2004). Charmaz (2014, p.215) suggested continuing interviews and analysis until new data ceases to "spark new theoretical insights" to the core categories, which would confirm categories have become saturated. However, theoretical saturation has been argued to better serve as an aim than a reality because it is too closely associated with idealistic quantitative completeness (Willig & Stainton-Rogers, 2017). Therefore, I adopted Dey's (2004) pragmatic principle of sufficiency of conceptual construction, given my research could not be removed from

the practical restraint of time limitations (Timonen et al., 2018). Theoretical construction ended when categories appeared to be robust enough to absorb new data without requiring ongoing alterations and extensions (Dey, 2004). Following a total of 13 interviews, seven follow-up interviews were carried out with Beech, Birch, Linden, Maple, Oak, Pine, and Willow. Written feedback was provided by Yew and Hawthorne. When the participants, research supervisors, and I shared agreement that categories had been sufficiently explained, the analysis concluded (Chun Tie et al., 2019; Nelson, 2016).

3.7 Memo-Writing

Memos served as the "storehouse of ideas" created through reflective engagement with participants and transcripts (Chun Tie et al., 2019, p.4). Memos helped sustain reflexivity on the process of increasing coding precision by: defining central categories; delineating the relevant properties of categories; explain analytic relationships between categories; and identifying gaps between categories (Charmaz, 2014). As emerging theoretical ideas were 'committed to paper', I compared data, codes, and categories so their definitions, properties, and dimensions could be distinguished (Henwood & Pidgeon, 2003, p.145). Reflections prompted further analytic exploration, which became more specific and structured as analysis progressed (Tweed & Charmaz, 2012). Memos aided theoretical sensitivity and creativity and acted as a fundamental 'holding' process (Timonen et al., 2018), which was essential to this method that requires both precision and tolerance of uncertainty when working with an ever-increasing dataset.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

The ethical principles outlined by the BPS Code of Human Research Ethics (2018) and the UEL (2015) 'Code of Practice for Research Ethics' guided my research. As a trainee counselling psychologist, I am mandated to respect the "dignity of persons and peoples" (p.5) and to minimise harm, to protect participants' rights and promote welfare in every aspect of my research (BPS, 2018). Therefore, the research activities were carefully considered throughout the research process in collaboration with two members of academic staff (BPS, 2018) and were formally validated by the UEL Ethics Committee ss Appendix J). To ensure requirements for fully informed consent and respect for participants' knowledge, insight, and expertise, prior to participation, each potential participant was provided with an information sheet that outlined the nature of the research

(BPS, 2018). Each prospective participant was offered two weeks to decide whether they would like to participate to help reduce any potential pressure (BPS, 2018). I was committed to honour any request to withdraw involvement and data from the study until three weeks after interview, when the data was aggregated in the data analysis stage of research (BPS, 2018). This was clearly explained to all prospective participants before they consented to participate (BPS, 2018). Participants' privacy and confidentiality was protected by anonymising all collected data and storing electronic data within password-protected files (BPS, 2018) and any physical data in a lockable cabinet (UEL, 2015). Participant data was stored for no longer than six months following completion of data analysis (BPS, 2018). As previously discussed, each participant was given the opportunity to a full debrief and the opportunity to ask any questions.

3.9 Trustworthiness and Rigour

Follow-up interviews helped ensure emerging theory remained grounded in the participants' perspectives and avoided participants being involved as "mere repositories of data" (Wimpenny & Gass, 2000, p. 1487). As a result of this process, I realised I could not create a 'neat' theory as the experience of eco-anxiety is fluid and context-dependent. Therefore, I mapped psychosocial processes onto the non-linear growth patterns of mycelium (see Appendix K). In this way, I sought to co-construct a meaningful narrative that served the community participants were recruited from. I also remained mindful of quality criteria specific to systematic and rigorous CGT (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2020). These quality criteria are discussed in depth in the discussion chapter.

4 Chapter Four: Findings

"I know this truth. It is the most important truth a human being could ever learn"
Willow [699-700]

4.1 Chapter Four Overview

This chapter presents an account of the CGT created in response to the research question, "What is the experience of eco-anxiety for individuals who have been through an ecopsychology support group for facing the climate crisis?" Because of the vast dataset and extensive analysis process, a full account of all categories and focused codes created was not viable in this chapter. Therefore, this chapter presents only categories that contributed the most conceptual clarity to theory construction, in accordance with the focus and underpinnings of the research question. This chapter begins with an elaboration of the full trajectory of experience of eco-anxiety.

4.2 The Theory of Eco-anxiety

The experience of eco-anxiety begins with an individual's openness to the possibility that "in the West, we have not got everything right." This leads to them questioning the status quo, especially in relation to social justice and the welfare of all inhabitants of Earth. Then, they learn that everyone in the UK, regardless of privilege, cannot be "the exception" and avoid suffering in their lifetime. Having endured suffering personally, an individual can readily empathise with those experiencing pain and loss anywhere, regardless of socioeconomic status or geography. As an individual learns about climate change, their awareness of its impacts and the severity of these develops. Busyness or distractedness makes this understanding difficult to contemplate, and sometimes denial curtails this process. The "freedom" and "privilege" to spend time contemplating this "slow disaster" results in an expansion of awareness that arouses curiosity, questioning, and learning. At this point, thoughts like "this is a massive worry" and "this is worthy of my attention" displace avoidant thinking. Acting in a pro-environmental way privately, for example, by cutting out meat and air travel, becomes more personally meaningful. As an individual pursues understanding, their learning progresses beyond the intellectual (such as private reading of facts and statistics) to include listening to experts share their

distress and stories. More experiential learning “opens up” a level of emotional experiencing that means information about climate change resonates in a deeper and more personal way. Connecting with others whose awareness of climate change is also growing accelerates relational learning. This relational learning increases self-awareness and supports the individual in realizing “I really care about this” and even that “this is not another disaster, but the disaster through which all others intersect.”

When an individual acts on their learning by committing to action beyond their comfort zone that can be witnessed publicly, this builds their sense of personal integrity, which supports their resilience and “appetite” for leaning into “the unfamiliar” or uncomfortable. This public action might involve direct action, activism, talking to a boss, or writing to a Member of Parliament. The personal meaningfulness of these experiences in deepening awareness lies in the personal cost of discomfort or challenge the individual endures, rather than the immediate outcome of an action. This is because during brave action the reality and enormity of the climate crisis “hits home.” These traumatic “oh shit” moments of realisation occur because the individual’s previous ideas of the world and identity shatter when shocking new awareness breaks through. New levels of emotional experiencing “open up” conscious awareness “in all directions”, threading through every part of their life and self. Collective action beyond the private or solitary facilitates an individual’s opening to their “true self”: the part of them that cares most deeply. As this happens, the individual may grieve for what is already lost and begin to feel dread for the potential of social collapse. Supported by the safety of connection with like-minded others and a sense of integrity bolstered through engagement in congruent action, an individual often feels unable to avoid “the unfathomable” scale of the climate crisis. Instead of defaulting to a mindset of “let's hope that it's all going to be fine”, the “awake” individual may experience sinking into mourning when they recognize their hopelessness about species that are gone and what is too late to prevent. Collective grieving practices within community and activist groups can enable the individual's mourning to be witnessed and processed through human connection. Comfort through connection with all living things often becomes increasingly important to the individual as their burden of climate change awareness becomes too much to bear alone. Feeling connected to people and all living things enables an individual’s grief to shapeshift and evolve through collective and interpersonal grieving processes, rather than becoming “frozen” or stuck. Friendships with like-minded others provide ways for the individual to build an integrated new identity around “the true self”. At this point, the practices of

"opening up" to care for all inhabitants of Earth and stewardship of conscious awareness of the climate crisis increasingly become more important than learning about climate change itself.

Learning how to "be with" the spectrum of emotions that awareness of the climate crisis activates begins with accepting these emotions as helpful messages on the journey of growth and reconnection to all life on Earth. An individual that accepts this becomes concerned with learning the emotional tools needed to negotiate the internal and social conflicts inherent in sustaining conscious awareness of the climate crisis. An individual's life can involve diverse distractions and demands that make thinking about the enormity of the climate crisis very difficult. Therefore, they learn to be intentional about how they "consume" climate related news, so they can use information to sharpen their focus on their personal response without becoming overwhelmed with despair. Building and sustaining the emotional availability to care for the climate crisis requires a lifestyle and personal growth that is unsupported by cultures of "profit over people." An individual soon learns that they cannot honour the caring parts of themselves they previously ignored in isolation. Connection with likeminded others facilitates emotionally energising conversations that validate their new thinking and emotions. An individual may find being with nature facilitates emotional rejuvenation and clarity. Their relationship to nature may become enriched through learning about and practising rituals and ceremonies from indigenous communities. An individual may further benefit from learning concepts such as "seeing with new eyes" and "active hope and gratitude", which help them give voice to their conscious awareness and hear this echoed by others. These concepts are central to Climate Grief or The Work That Reconnects groups. "Braided learning" through developing a shared language in groups enables the individual to experience validation of "difficult to verbalize" experiences with other group participants. An individual may feel invited to work through internalised racism and "capitalist thinking", so they can personally develop as caretakers of life on Earth, instead of remaining consumers or dominators.

As an individual reprioritises their life around their care for a suffering planet, they attempt to let go of high-carbon pleasures they previously enjoyed. This process of sacrifice often requires the different parts of an individual's mind "to meet and have a conversation" about how much they "miss flying, buying new clothes, and simply not thinking about what to eat." This means an individual's experience of seemingly opposite emotions increasingly becomes more integrated. For example, love and pain can become

experienced less as separate states, where one diminishes the other, but more "side by side" in any given moment. When an individual allows themselves to "be with" and mourn these losses, while celebrating each step towards living "fully alive" to their values, they can find new ways to enjoy the fullness and richness of life. Because the depth that we feel love is the depth that we feel grief, practising "letting go" in communion with others is important to "cushion loss". An individual's sacrifice is rarely limited to lifestyle and often includes diminished intimacy with family and friends who are less interested in the climate crisis. Remaining congruent with values for care and connection to life may be an ongoing challenge due to the current socio-political climate in the UK of hostility towards individuals with heightened "climate consciousness." An individual may reintroduce themselves to friends in a way that honours intimacy shared previously, while also communicating what they care about, so they can continue to relate authentically. An individual's sense of loneliness may be eased by noticing how they are connected to the increasing number of individuals in the UK "doing things differently". By rejecting a mindset of "exceptionalism" and "entitlement to avoid suffering", which is prevalent in UK culture, an individual can increasingly experience a sense of "being one with all of life on Earth." This sense of connection strengthens an individual's emotional tolerance for the intensity of their experience of grief, fear, sadness and joy as they live consciously on a suffering planet. This sense of connection can be particularly important to an individual when there is no certainty about the future or what personal responses to the climate crisis are best aligned to their skills and resources. An individual's ability to "be with" this uncertainty can only be sustained through choosing to love all of life on Earth, find joy in nature, and stay with the difficult feelings that this activates. In this way, an individual's experience of "waves of grief" never comes to an end. This experience is uncomfortable but can be accompanied by an increasing sense of peace, connection, and gratitude that leads to a richer experience of life and sense of communion with all living beings.

4.3 Psychosocial Processes of Eco-Anxiety

There was consensus among all participants that eco-anxiety did not occur instantaneously and instead was an experience that grew in the "soil of their longstanding awareness" that we have "not been doing things right by people or the planet" in the UK. As Rowan stated, "all my adult life, I've known that we've been doing things wrong." Many participants shared that they had always been aware of climate change but held

hope that "someone was dealing with it" or had been too busy or distracted to think about it and develop a fuller understanding. This awareness was coupled with values for integrity, a 'deep commitment to truth', social justice, and an appreciation of nature. Empathy and the ability to tolerate difficult feelings were other key traits participants highlighted. Another factor that seemed relevant to the experience of eco-anxiety was thoughtfulness and nuanced holistic thinking. Beech called this "swinging from the big picture to the personal picture." Those working in careers congruent with their values seemed practised at 'pivoting' from the 'big picture' to the personal, guided by their internal compass rather than by external demands in their lives. What made the experience ultimately possible seemed to be the attention participants could dedicate to understanding the problem of climate change.

Within the first core category of theory: "the psychosocial processes of eco-anxiety", four subcategories were produced. Firstly, factual learning about climate change led participants to make space to understand the problem. Secondly, relational and experiential learning about the climate crisis led to greater awareness and emotional engagement. Thirdly, participants' commitment to action outside of their previous comfort zone led to deeper emotional processing of their understanding of the climate crisis and a realisation of "Oh shit! It's worse than I thought". Fourthly, participants' acceptance of their understanding and sense of dread elicited grief for "all that has been lost" and will continue to be degraded and destroyed because of the climate crisis.

4.3.1 *Factual Learning: Becoming Conscious of Climate Change*

All participants described becoming intellectually aware of climate change through personal research (via scientific reports, news media, or formal education). Birch stated, "I think the kind of intellectually […] environmental awareness kind of probably came through … my anthropology course." Participants described their alarm when learning about feedback loops, environmental destruction, and disinformation perpetuating problems. Beyond their values and interests, most participants attributed their awareness to having time to read, think, learn about, and understand climate change, sometimes due to a change in responsibilities, early retirement, or working in a job relevant to climate change. Participants often referred to their initial learning as activating a desire to do something about it, even when they lacked knowledge of what to do beyond acting privately in a more environmentally sustainable way (e.g. reducing personal emissions footprint by avoiding flights and eating meat). This new awareness coupled with an active

private response was described as precipitating an increased consciousness of climate change in their daily lives.

4.3.2 *Relational, Experiential Learning About the Climate Crisis*

All participants talked about noticing how much they cared about the serious problem of climate change and therefore making space and needing to allow sufficient time and energy for their personal responses to be processed. Participants recalled a diverse range of ways they built on their understanding of climate change through conferences, documentaries, attending WTR groups, and hearing thought leaders share.

> Linden*: "I needed to have the space to meet people outside of my bubble, like learn, read, go to events, go to conferences, figure out how much it is that I don't know […] there were lots of workshops and seminars and things like that where I was just getting overloaded with more information […] seeing people speak in the flesh who (been) have working in these sectors for like a decade or two decades, who get it and. […] hearing their words […] and everything I've been feeling myself. I was like, these people have kind of given up their lives, they work in this and they are kind of petrified."* [171-234]

Relational and experiential learning seemed to activate emotions that facilitated a level of experiencing beyond intellectual learning about climate change. Birch explained a process of moving away from impersonal abstractions from climate change science or statistics to building on direct experiences of being in nature and realising how much "I do actually care." Several participants recalled significant moments of learning how "big picture" social justice issues were personal and intersected with their private lives. Several participants described their understanding of the need for climate justice because of how intersecting oppressions contribute to and maintain the climate crisis.

> Linden: *"I see climate change as being linked in to so many other kinds of social justice issues […] women's rights, education, wealth inequality, refugees, like all these things kind of make me angry in the sense of... we've got the knowledge, we've got the money it's like […] we are in the twenty first century people [...] why can't we sort this out?"* [121-126]

> Yew: *"there are so many different oppressions, racism, homophobia, classism […] climate justice is [about] creating the just community, which doesn't have these oppressions, which is what we need if we're going to deal with the catastrophe that hits us. It's like if we think back to 1940 here […] bombs raining down, the city on fire, people had to come together to look out for each other."* [395-402]

Participants spoke about feeling a personal sense of guilt, responsibility, and regret as the destruction caused by accelerated climate change became more personally relevant.

> Maple**:** *"I think greenhouse gases when I was a kid was really big […], but I saw in New Zealand with our friends 'The Inconvenient Truth', and it had quite a profound impact […] on how I was living my life to how I am now, and so I came back all guns blazing, like 'we need to do something, this is horrendous'"* [13-28]

> Rowan: *"you are a bit of that rotting fruit.[…] even if you are a bit of the apple that looks OK, […] that bit that doesn't look brown, but it still tastes funny because the other bit's rotting…. […] even if you're not directly being impacted, your house isn't being flooded or whatever, I think you are affected by the taint […], the people sort of in complete denial […] think they're a different piece of fruit altogether […] I think eco-anxiety is when you know that you are part of the rotting fruit…. Yes. I know I am a bit of the rotting apple. […] everything around me tastes funny."* [515-518]

Experiential and relational learning prompted participants to seek clarity about what action outside of their comfort zones was worthwhile.

4.3.3 *Realising It Is Worse Than We Thought*

Participants recalled a variety of ways they engaged publicly with the climate crisis including: teaching entrepreneurs how to take action, campaigning about air pollution, protesting against the removal of local green spaces, and engaging in non-violent direct action through Extinction Rebellion. Extinction Rebellion, the activism group, aims to act so governments communicate the truth about climate change to enable the urgent and radical changes the science states are required (Extinction Rebellion, 2019). All participants described the process of committing to action outside of their comfort zone enabling eco-anxiety to "become real."

> Willow: *"I remember actually ticking the box saying, 'yeah, I was prepared to go to prison'. When I came out thinking, 'my god, what have I stepped into here?' But was really pleased. I had […] a massive wake up of like, you know, we really are absolutely screwed and we need to do something about it. So I suppose that was the beginning of the real eco-anxiety instead of just low levels for decades, knowing that things were wrong and it was unsustainable."* [28-33]

Several participants shared that their hope increased when they initially engaged in activism because it felt like they were building something that could be heard and would make a difference while connecting with others who shared their concerns.

> Willow: *"I really didn't know anybody who shared those views, like I say, I was a little bit kind of ostracised, I think, all of a sudden I was stepping into a camp where everybody's on the same page. They're all realising that we're in we're in dire straits and something really urgent and extreme needs to be done if there's any chance of turning this ship around."* [45-49]

This level of committed action combined with learning that climate change is worse than previously imagined seemed to catalyse a "waking up" to climate change. All participants recalled "oh shit moments" of traumatic realisation that everyone is blinkered to climate change, "those who need to care do not care", and we are powerless to avoid climate change. Participants highlighted how feelings of deep despair, bafflement, and incredulity were activated when they lost hope that current systems and those in power would change appropriately and when they realised the rest of the population was in denial. This weighty realisation led to intolerable distress, anger, and a sense of powerlessness. This was also associated with learning about how humanity has solutions, but has lacked the collective will for to enact change.

> Linden: *"I feel like it was the first time I had this really sinking feeling in my gut because I was like, these are the people with the power. […] they're really smart people. And if they don't get it or if they get it and they don't care about it, like we're kind of screwed because these are the people that are running the world … oh, my goodness, like the people that need to care ... don't."* [82-91]

Participants conceptualised eco-anxiety as traumatic because it involved the shattering of beliefs about the world and self. Juniper felt this could activate deep-rooted, early developmental traumas of a disappearing world (e.g. 'disappearing womb'), and loss of the ability to depend on our safe surroundings.

> Juniper: *"things were going to get better for them for the next generation. […] There was going to be an evolution of, you know, society over time, we still needed to work for it, but it was going to improve. […] And now that isn't going to be the case, there is going to be a shortage of basic things that we've taken for granted. And there's going to be mass migration as we're seeing already, […] there's going to be social upheaval because we're not prepared in any way for this change that's needed. […] That is a very disturbing thought and the fact that it's happening and there isn't a real... we're not in an emergency."* [102-110]

> Beech: *"It's inherently traumatic, isn't it, to be presented with what we are and be imprisoned at the same time, […]... in prisons that basically makes us complicit in causing our own harm […] it's a tightness and it's despair, […] born from this sense that there's nowhere to go, there are no solutions."* [124-129]

> Pine: *"I'm pretty sure my kids will [see it] and I won't be there […] which is an appalling thought…so I do feel traumatised by it"* [191-192]

Participants stated words like "anxiety", "despair", and "panic" would fail to describe their experience. Participants said "eco-fear", "eco-terror" or "eco-dread" would more accurately portray their deep concern about the "loss we are suffering" and are powerless to control. Several participants described the difficulty of being in constant awareness of the problem with its growing enormity while also being cognisant of the reality that society is not responding. Maple stated, "the sense of urgency is profound that you're grappling with, like the sense of urgency whilst everything around you just not moving and not doing anything about it."

> Willow: *"And one of the images I have is […] there are people on the beach that are still picnicking. [...] I'm going around the people on the beach that are having their picnic. Have you seen in the distance there's a Tsunami coming? We need to take cover. Right? [N: Hmm] And again, they say 'I can't see anything now. I'll be fine'. And they're just passing around the sandwiches and the wine. And so I go on to another lot of people and say, you see what's coming, there's a tsunami coming. We need to take cover ..."* [439-447]

Maple, Pine, and Willow described their experience as "peering into the abyss" with "dread" while knowing "most people are unwilling" or unable to respond to climate change, which further lessens the chance of a "soft landing" to our "awful, desperate and hopeless future." Participants described not knowing what to do with these feelings while still experiencing an increased resolve to act on them publicly. Oak stated, "I'm sat here [protesting] because people are dying. […] Because we're killing ourselves through chopping down trees." Willow shared, "for me [my motivation] is the people that are dying now on the other side of the world because of climate change."

It is important to note that, regardless of the level of distress elicited by "oh shit moments", all participants believed this was a normal, adaptive response, not a disorder, and not a 'rich person' or 'young person' problem. Pine stated, "I think actually it's a very healthy psychological response to the situation isn't it ... because how could you not be traumatised?"

> Hazel: *"eco-fear or fear maybe is a better word because it feels like it's about emotion, whereas anxiety is more like a problematic emotion, or a pathologised one. So, yeah, I don't really like 'eco-anxiety'. For me, it just is like a wake up and a realisation of the situation that we're in. And then like the normal response that my body would have to knowing that we're in a really bad situation."* [21-25]

4.3.4 *Collective Grief: Dreading and Accepting*

Almost all participants recalled accepting the hopelessness of the climate crisis to "really face the loss." This acceptance seemed to enable them to 'sink' into grief by thinking about what has already been lost, will be lost, and knowing there is no escaping our context. For many participants, recalling global environmental degradation prompted profound sadness with tears, gulps, and stalls.

> Maple: *"in trauma, they talk about like that cascade effect, […] when I think about what we've lost already, what we're losing now and what we're going to lose. I think that's kind of what happens in the cascade of grief."* [541-544]

Acacia and Maple described connecting to the rapidity of the loss: how quickly everything could be taken away and how the beauty we currently have "might be gone" faster than expected. They also described grappling with waves of grief like an 'outpouring' of "we can't get this back" based on the knowledge that "all that has taken thousands of years to grow can never get recreated." Participants believed it was important to not only 'connect' to the impact of what is no longer alive for humanity, but also what it is no longer alive for all creatures and plants as a result.

All participants spoke about the difference between believing "we can get through this" and realising "things are hopeless". This shift in perspective was activated when participants accepted "there is no planet B" and no 'solving this context' because "we can't fight climate change" or "make it go away." Several participants held the belief that seeking hope to soften this experience was unhelpful as it undermined healthy grief.

> Willow: *"once you bring in the hope, it kills it, […] people need to have put hope to one side and the hope […] should be placed on how can I best cope with the absolute truth rather than some hope being invested in there's still time to turn it around and fix it. [N: Hmm] If anyone is thinking we can still turn it around, you know, if we act now, it won't be too late. And we've got 10 years and all this stuff […] They're not really living it. You have to really sort of peer into the abyss with this and look at the bleakness of it absolutely before you can then turn around and see the gold that's there."* [738-745]

Many participants likened their experience of grief to receiving a cancer diagnosis or grieving the death of someone they loved.

> Maple: *"when I worked with somebody and they ended their life and it was like it's like I can't have that conversation I need to have with you right now. […] OK, now I've got to accept this is now just different and we can't get back what we had and what we had was really precious and. We shouldn't have lost it, and so. [cries] […] you're not going to have that back in that way and then what will we have going forward? Yeah, and not wanting to keep losing all of this stuff".* [555-562]

However, most participants also made an essential distinction that grief about the planet was more traumatising and wounding than 'other griefs' because it will not lessen with time as it is not just a personal loss but instead an "every-living-thing-loss."

> Pine: *"god. It sounds so awful to say doesn't it but being constantly aware of our awful, desperate and hopeless future. […] that classic thing of waking up first thing in the morning and you are not not aware of it. So there's a real sweet few seconds. And there's that [gasp] that realisation comes to you... So it's that kind of thing [N: Hmm] But it doesn't go... when someone has died... over a period of time that lessens doesn't it.. […] when maybe 10 years past so many years pass it's it's not quite as raw. Whereas it's kind of the other way round. Just every day... almost every night.. that just kind of shows you that it is probably going to be quicker than you thought it might've done a few months back."* [380-391]

Similarly, Beech shared that eco-anxiety is not a cognitively driven experience, but one that is emotional and difficult to describe because it is beyond words. Participants expanded on this, explaining that sometimes there is more dread than grief, and sometimes more confusion, depression, and numbness. However, grief was consistently described as distinct from anger or frustration or rage.

Outcomes of grieving included beautiful places and relationships that previously inspired awe and enjoyment beginning to elicit pain and heavy sadness. Acacia, Birch, and Oak talked about becoming acutely aware that green landscapes they saw actually "had no biodiversity" and were far from their natural state. Hazel and Acacia recalled a time when they felt frozen in grief, in a state of "definites and doomery", where certainty and black and white projections of the future felt like being "drowned by empathy", and they did not know what to do with the anxious energy activated.

Most participants talked about the importance of groups (such as the WTR) in creating the necessary safety for grief to emerge among those who took it seriously. Participants described that observing others in mourning deepened their grief because it simultaneously elicited empathy as well as validation.

> Beech: *"I watched […] 'We, The Uncivilised'. And and there were a few things in that that really, really reached me and stuck with me quite powerfully, […] a group of people holding a ceremony {teary eyed} mourning ..the loss of …all the species.. that have gone extinct in our lifetime […] seeing people really, like <u>really seriously honouring</u> [N: hm] that in a really special way [N: hmmmm] was something that was so completely radical for me […] I didn't know that there were people out there that. Um, were, actually, um yeah honouring <u>what I realised in that moment I was holding in me</u> and it just they were <u>expressing something {hand to heart} I realised I was feeling</u>. {wipes eyes} […]… just kind of bubbling under the surface for me"* [45-59]

Beyond witnessing others experiencing grief, having physical access to support groups and safe spaces was highlighted as important because the "heavy burden of grief needs to be shared." Participants described moving through a spectrum of emotions in group experiences, where frustration and despair expanded into sadness and grief. Similarly, several participants highlighted the importance of learning to "lean into" grief, rather than simply withstanding it, by creating holding spaces through ritual and ceremony. For example, Linden talked about asking "what is the grief asking of me?" and "stepping through grief as a doorway", which was defined as "going forward in grief" by reconciling with what has been lost, what we will "never get back" and grieving the 'micro and macro' for the 'past, present and future'. Birch and Oak described finding comfort in the change that loss demands because so much growth can arise from opening up to grief. Oak stated, "there's definitely sort of guilt and fear and sadness and despair. At times […] the despair and the surrender is quite liberating." Linden and Juniper talked about how going through this grieving process inspired and reconnected them with themselves and others towards meaningful action because "we need to process and be with eco-anxiety" rather than trying to 'cure it.' Several participants believed that unexpressed grief can worsen anxiety and undermine wellbeing, and therefore needs to be treated as "an opening to be explored". Although incredibly challenging, all participants mentioned how natural and necessary it was to process this 'deep and valid grief'. Beech and Oak believed we are all feeling this grief on some level, but that we express it, connect to it, and distract ourselves in different ways because we do not all have the skills and safe spaces to be with it.

> Oak: *"some people question […] what's the value of sitting in the grief? And actually, I think we're feeling the grief anyway, whether you recognise it as that or not […] Because however you live, you can't disconnect from... However, much concrete you put around you, and in fact the more concrete you put around you, the harder, I think [it is]. You don't know what it is, but it hurts."* [585-518]

> Hazel: *"this is not something that is for like weak people or people with mental health problems or people that are more sensitive. I think the 'canaries down the mine' are feeling it now and the people that are actually in in the disaster zones are feeling it now. So this is just going to be just a very universal feeling"* [515-525]

Similarly, almost all participants noted that knowing how to be with the painful emotions of grief was something they intentionally developed.

4.4 The Psychosocial Processes of Regeneratively Sustained Eco-Anxiety

Within the second core category, four subcategories were produced. Firstly, learning about how to be with the difficult emotions that accompany an awareness of the climate crisis became more important than factual learning. Secondly, relational and experiential learning began to focus on building connections with people and nature towards deeper emotional resilience and capacity to engage with the crisis. Thirdly, participants commitment to action led to a process of identity reconstruction and recalibration of their lives to their values and sense of connection. Fourthly, participants welcomed their grief because although it continued to be painful, it was fuelled by love for life and empowered by joy for what is still alive in the face of the climate crisis.

4.4.1 *Emotional Learning: Building an Emotional Toolkit to Honour New Awareness*

Most participants talked about no longer being able to return to their 'pre-awake life' because it would be a great disservice to the self. Linden stated "this feeling of when you need to cry, and you just hold it in…. […] it sits in there and creates a knot…" Several participants talked about committing to "whatever it is that I can" to move through and release the spectrum of emotions activated to enable clear thinking and action that is sustainable and regenerative. All participants recognised their need to develop an emotional 'toolkit' to be with, rather than 'squash down', the feelings activated so that eco-anxiety could be regeneratively sustained. As examples, participants referenced attending groups, receiving coaching, listening to psychology podcasts, and learning non-Western therapy approaches to emotions. Yew defined regenerative culture as "developing understanding of how we can help people, […] look after themselves, look after each other, develop good relationships with each other, help support the community

[…] into climate justice." Acacia, Yew, and Linden shared how these processes helped them see clearly and act effectively.

> Linden: *"there really needs to be this perception of seeking help and support to move through this, [..] not to squash it, because I don't think it will be squashed, quite frankly. And I think squashing it will only end up in something far worse than being supported to move through it and let it out and be curious about it and look at it."* [488-492]

Several participants identified the conflicting nature of eco-anxiety to be an invitation to accelerate personal growth and proactively pursue what is most important, such as connection, community, and ethical activism.

All participants talked about building emotional tools through collective experiences, such as WTR groups, to feel fully, which encouraged, validated, and spurred them on in honouring their personal experience of facing climate change. Most participants also talked about learning from people more experienced in eco-anxiety who have similar values. Several participants talked about investing in the mind-body connection through yoga and meditation as a way of building tolerance to face the unbearable. Linden recalled how her awareness shifted as she learned the more she welcomed her grief and despair and let it flow through her body, the quicker it passed, allowing love and resolve to strengthen.

> Linden: *"I feel like I can feel something that needs to come out like… it's like a grief that is the next wave. And it gets the point around, that I am just like… 'just come' […] Which is not something... I never would have said early in my life to like, 'welcome, welcome despair'. But […] I'm at that point where I welcome it. I want to release it because by releasing it, I feel like I'm moving forward. And it's like the more you let it just come through... the quicker it passes, you can move through it and you have a different sense of awareness. And I think that awareness kind of helps and you see a purpose to it."* [472-480]

Many participants believed welcoming, validating, and allowing the message of emotions to be heard and released had helped them avoid burning out disavowal, or frozen 'stuckness'. Participants highlighted how crucial emotional work was in preceding action to enable 'strategic' action, rather than just 'reactive' action to reduce internal distress.

Most participants mentioned building boundaries around their actions to safeguard resilience, so they were strong enough to live congruently with their values in order to face and respond to planetary devastation in a sustainable way.

> Hazel: *"you've stopped hearing the pain of the world and you are now interpreting that in really unhelpful ways that are meaning that you're not focusing on your children because you're too busy worried about them dying tomorrow. You maybe, you need to find a balance".* [275-278]

In particular, most participants mentioned being disciplined and boundaried about how much they read about climate change and how much science, news, social media or information from the "constant torrent of bad news" they absorbed to avoid unintentionally activating sadness, grief, and despair when they lacked time to attend emotionally or respond. Hazel shared that once she realised the problem and "its magnitude", she had little motivation to read about it unless this would help nudge her towards action or overcome a moment of becoming "sedate towards it." Participants also talked about facing climate change in small pieces to sharpen focus rather than become overcome by despair.

> Oak: ***"****and I just had to just walk up and down just absolutely in bits, like just crying from the bottom of my soul. And it felt really good to cry that hard. And then [after the group] when I went to work the next day, … we can't be devastated the whole time. That's not a healthy place to be. So it's good to have moments"* [450-459]

Several participants talked about building self-awareness through reflection, such as working through internalised racist and capitalist thinking, attending to the internal work in progress, and their personal journey of healing.

> Willow**:** *"you have to go through a lot of kind of painful looking at stuff, […] turning over stones and having a look underneath at stuff that is really like a gaping wound, and you much rather that wound be covered up, even though it's festering under there…"* [531-534]

> Oak: *"it's working with my own conflict, […] we've all got our own inner Trump and we've all got our own inner land mine and tree chopper. I know I do […] Like which part of myself am I my not letting myself listen to? Or that I shout out and tell 'you are not valuable and to be heard."* [365-369]

As a result of building emotional capacity, participants recognised how consumer capitalism is failing to meet fundamental human needs. Participants also shared how lonely it is living in a society dominated by patriarchy and neoliberal ideology.

> Birch: *"we're eating the shit food, like we're eating the food that is not actually feeding us […] on a base level that there's a there's an anxiety, which I think is not even surfaced, that is just like in our in that disconnected relationship that is just carried by our bodies like that, that we don't even feel anymore because we're we're just so used to this way of living."* [505-509]

All participants talked about rejecting toxic capitalist mindsets and mentioned how a society built on individualism and a drive to consume ever more results in "more mortgages" but "not satisfaction." Participants noticed how patriarchy and capitalism make an emotional "toolkit" less available because we are not taught to experience life in all its richness. Most participants talked about "waking up" to how 'backward' and unsophisticated our approach to societal connection and collective living is in the West. Beech and Linden reported recognising the 'obscenity' and injustice of modern living, which perpetuates a lack of shared responsibility and shared language. Beech talked about how British people struggle to find language for climate change because our ways of communicating have been stripped of the concept of collective responsibility, which Juniper also described as a legacy from Britain's colonial history. Juniper highlighted how we share lived experience but lack connection because we are taught to receive things simply as information, which is stripped of emotional valence or personal meaning, which proliferates a lack of depth in relationships. Thus, the accepted status quo is disconnection and disavowal of inner conflicting emotions.

> Hazel**:** *"I don't think I'm necessarily more emotionally mature or immature than someone else. I think it's just that I was lucky enough to find or knew about the kind of tools that help. […] I think we live in a society that don't value the kinds of things that help like like connection, like emotional sharing, like listening, validating, gratitude. Patriarchy and capitalism don't really like those things because they don't make money. […] Unless we can give people an environment that allows them to feel those feelings and not be alone with them and not fall apart with them and not feel guilty about them, like there's a lot of 'oh, my God, oh, no, I ate that banana' and ..A lot of personal responsibility, guilt that goes along with waking up that then it's just too exhausting."* [134-143]

Almost all participants felt talking about emotions is becoming more normative, and that they are beginning to disentangle themselves from "patriarchal action-only-oriented" approaches to life. Participants talked about recognising a need for a new way of living that is regenerative and more interconnected.

4.4.2 *Relational, Experiential Learning to Build Connection With Each Other and Nature*

All participants talked about how enriching it was to find community among like-minded people through attending events on climate change or joining activist groups where people with similar experiences could bond over shared values and beliefs. Most participants believed eco-anxiety cannot be done alone and needs to be processed collectively with social support and community because it often activates complex emotions. Participants described "falling off the edge" in eco-anxiety into isolation because distant relationships were not enough. Yew shared that connecting through different forms of collective activism resulted in an "almost instant" extended network of friends. Rowan also talked about appreciating knowing people at different places on the spectrum from denial to "hardcore deep adaptation." All participants talked about benefiting richly from collective experiences where they could connect with others who understand the enormity of climate change and are brave enough to say, "let's do something about it." Maple and Rowan shared that although collective support did not take away difficult emotions, it seemed to "lighten the load" and enable them to "laugh and be outraged together." Hazel stated, "the only reason I find that strength is because of the other people that help me."

All participants believed that regardless of eco-anxiety, community is fundamental to life, a right, and a human need for survival. All participants understood the climate crisis to be a result of our chronic self-neglect of our fundamental need for connection, which we have instead attempted to meet through unsustainable lifestyles. Beech shared, "It feels like everything comes back to that, […] (if) we had healthy communities, […] we just wouldn't be causing the harm that we are." Beech and Birch explained that our disconnection from each other and the Earth has resulted in us becoming 'malnourished' emotionally, so communicating about climate change has become very difficult. Most participants identified our relationship with each other and the Earth as fundamental to growing through eco-anxiety.

> Beech: *"It's all so distorted and fragmented […] the way our lives kind of overlap but don't interact in intimate ways. […] not knowing your neighbour's names, Not knowing if you can trust them […] living with a sense of distrust of … and just unknowingness for the people around us. That's. To me, just far sadder than if I were on a planet all of my own"* [194-201]

Oak built on this by highlighting our lack of "collective spaces", which means we lack a sense of connection to the people and places our lives are woven around; instead, we absorb narratives of 'us' and 'them' and make excuses about why it is inappropriate to knock on a neighbour's door or care for what is "the whole" but still ours to care for.

Participants highlighted how attending a WTR group significantly reduced their sense of aloneness and isolation because it was a safe place for connection and resolution of difficult emotions. Several participants described hearing their unspoken thoughts shared by a "normal" and "random mix" of strangers led to the realisation of "oh my god, I'm not the only one who feels strongly." Acacia described how important it was to be part of a group that cared about climate change and to connect through almost counter-cultural levels of vulnerability so they could be humans simply sitting and facing each other. Oak stated, "you want to go to places where people have some shared deep feelings […] and I think that was the thing, before I used to feel so alone."

Further to witnessing others' vulnerability, participants described profound moments of expressing their own feelings. Participants recalled this as particularly aided by learning the "language of the WTR" model, including the phrases "more-than-human" and "seeing with new eyes."

> Maple: *"The ability to speak about the stuff with no needing to defend or judge or that people are accepting and get it.. As opposed to it drops like a balloon or you know. […] becomes like a safe place in my mind or a place of, of connection and resolution to. Yeah, my emotions get heard and understood and I can move"* [221-228]
>
> Oak: *"I think that's what's so powerful about that weekend, […] coming together as a group of people, strangers on a Friday and quite deeply connected by Sunday and just feeling very safe and and just really awakening, […] and getting in touch with […] the depths of some of those feelings that you can't go […] when you come out of the open and alive world, and you're like 'wow' and your eyes are bright and sparkly"* [559-565]
>
> Acacia: *"seeing people come out the other side and the difference […] feels quite magic because it's generally quite a short period of time […] we have so much power in what we can do together. So a very energising and kind of inspiring."* [179-182]

All participants talked about recognising our need for interconnectedness with the Earth, with nature, and recognising our reciprocal relationship with all the living systems. Linden described her experience of rediscovering her relationship with nature during a

modern "vision quest", which involved spending time in nature to reconnect to her life purpose through ancient and indigenous practices.

> Linden: *"it's kind of like a nature retreat […] with some wilderness guides and […] gathered as a group over a week. But within that you spend three days by yourself alone in nature, fasting, with no clocks, no books […] part of the purpose is to sit there with nature […] you notice the tides coming in and out, the clouds going past that, all of the life around you […] but the Earth is alive, like, you know, you just look around you, it's all alive! […] was a really powerful experience…"*[184-209]

Participants talked about realising the way we see the world in the West is only one way and beginning to consider their roles as humans as "caretakers and stewards rather than dominators and controllers." Juniper and Linden shared their belief that we need to humble ourselves and learn from collectivist communities who "know better than us." Participants described learning principles from indigenous communities that speak on behalf of the Earth, including: "passing back learning through storytelling"; "only taking what you need"; "giving back and leaving something for the next person"; and "developing a respect for life and all other lifeforms."

Several participants talked about how being in community enabled them to act. Rather than "getting stuck", participants talked about "getting radical" through conversations that catalysed into collective action. However, participants also shared how difficult it can be to know what to do. Although equipped with increasing self-awareness and capacity for connection, most participants described often not knowing which responsibilities or tasks felt 'authentic' to their skills and abilities. Others who knew what they wanted to do described continuing to wonder whether they are doing "the right things."

4.4.3 *Reconstructing Life and Social Selves Through Sacrifice and Navigating Internal Conflict*

Most participants described living with eco-anxiety as hard, uncomfortable and conflicting because it involved moments of realising "Oh shit! It's worse than I thought" and concerns about social collapse alongside being "engaged in difficult things." Several participants described expecting safety to break down in one, five or twenty years, but having no certainty about "how long we have until social collapse" and hoping we would live whatever time we have left with purpose. Pine stated, "it is an unknown how quickly it's going to unravel, especially societal collapse, which will be the biggest thing."

Willow shared, “I do think that the social collapse is pretty much inevitable. It’s just a question of whether it’s slow or abrupt or whether it’s or whether it’s deeply terrifying or whether it’s more gradual.”

> Hawthorne: *“I was visiting all these ruined temples […] reading about this, the empires […] collapsed […] through war and greed. [laughs] And I remember sitting in Delphi and thinking, ‘oh, my God, is that what we’re heading for […] is society going to come to the point where it’s just going to implode on its own itself?’ And although they probably won’t be ruins, the, the empire’s monumental spires of offices and what we have built, are they going to become useless?”* [129-135]
>
> Oak: *“I can think about the world […] and the images that I perhaps see in my mind are fires burning and huge smoggy cities, […] people having to move en masse and yeah, refugee camps and [N:hmm] and pollution in the seas and plastic bobbing around.”* [124-127]

Many participants described feeling the weighty burden of awareness of climate change and that collectively our current climate change responses are not enough to mitigate the impacts of the climate crisis which is largely outside of our individual control. Hazel warned about the importance of listening and responding to eco-anxiety because if “I don’t give my feelings voice, they will go away.” This thinking seemed to be accompanied by a focus on what and who were within their circles of influence. All participants described eco-anxiety “as very organising” because it integrates so many values and interests. Maple shared, “it’s become the thing I make all the choices around now […] all the different passions of my life, they sort of started linking all together rather than being separate things.” All participants described ‘unhooking’ from previous ways of being that were contributing more to climate change and realigning their lives to care for the planet in its abused state by changing: lifestyle; career; housing; decisions about having children; parenting approaches; buying and/or eating habits; holidays; and retirement plans. Juniper explained her previous post-retirement dreams to travel no longer held appeal or felt justifiable just because she could afford them.

However, the process of sacrificing was described as sometimes involving being sorely tempted, having strong doubts, and grappling with questions about the justifiability of experiences they were missing out on. Hawthorne described discovering personal “tipping points” as he gave up things, which meant sacrifice could be approached slowly and with gratitude. In this way, sacrifice could feel satisfying when substituted with alternatives, rather than things being cut out completely overnight.

Further to careful lifestyle planning, many participants emphasised how important it was to acknowledge the difficulty of sacrifice to build their capacity to make congruent choices. Rather than disavow "high-carbon pleasures" enjoyed in the past or be "deluded that sacrificing will be easy or romanticising the process", Hazel emphasised the importance of allowing herself to grieve the losses of change, so the "conflicting parts of my mind could chat with each other" and weighing up the pros and cons of compromising "my needs versus the environments' needs." This enabled Hazel to recognise the long-term benefits over her momentary loss. Juniper, Rowan, and Willow talked about finding joy in "living the change they want to see in the world" by moving away from a "malnourished life" that did not nourish them or the planet. However, all sacrificial change required a process of integrating their social selves and negotiation within relationships.

Hazel described taking "radical action" by choosing to live a different way so that "we don't just sit" and "mentally decay" as climate change worsens. Those who engaged in activism towards collectively impacting government policy noted complicated psychosocial processes. Firstly, participants shared how intimidating they found activism. Many participants also talked about feeling afraid and comparing themselves to "braver activists." Participants did not personally identify as an activist or "rebel" despite engaging in or appreciating the importance of these roles. Willow and Oak shared uncomfortable encounters with strangers while engaging in "front line" activism that resulted in feeling scared, exposed, or stupid, especially when shouted at or threatened by passers-by. For some, being a member of a "reactive" and "disliked" group, as labelled by news media, was very difficult, and they described how committed engagement in activism was emotionally taxing and time-consuming. Understanding what sort of activism felt "right" was difficult and sometimes required re-constructing social identities to integrate the "awake" parts of themselves of which they had become conscious.

Some participants highlighted their personal struggles were impacted by the 'social intolerance' of eco-anxiety in British culture, which was apparent in the news media labelling climate change activists as extremists and hypocrites. Beech and Willow reported feeling the need to sometimes hide their concerns to avoid being perceived as "a bloody do-gooder" or as a hypocrite taking a moral high ground.

> Willow: *"as a society, we've got stuck in that. You know, everyone who's an activist is a, is a hypocrite, you know, […] it's that ridiculous childishness of you know, you're not allowed to say I want a better world, a fairer world, [..]unless I am some eco-saint […] living in some cave somewhere and eating nothing and naked. It's like it doesn't make sense."* [676-690]

Several participants described how sharing their eco-anxiety is difficult because of the uncomfortable reactions of others they experienced within friendship groups and from news media. Sharing with "the unconverted" elicited feelings of loss and isolation with people they otherwise felt very close to. Participants described the maddening experience of not speaking the same language with the people closest to them in their own families. Many described a lack of interest or understanding from others, resulting in their eco-anxiety being disregarded by family or friends. Linden shared her frustration about struggling to convince people of the severity of the climate crisis because "the masses […] in the box […] of surface-level living" have put themselves in a "happy cage". Some felt this led to a realisation that even if they continually questioned how to share about eco-anxiety more effectively, it would not make a difference because eco-anxiety is not about intellectual knowledge alone. Several participants suggested the difficulties of sharing eco-anxiety may stem from a broader social intolerance of relating deeply, which means the ways we talk to each other are often stripped of deep emotion. Beech shared that we cannot know how to express that for which we lack cultural language. Participants described feeling a strain on their relationships when their choices seemed to constrain their friends' fun or unintentionally induced guilt.

> Maple: *"we've got no intention of that but they literally apologise to us […] 'why are you apologising'? […] it's like mortifying. […] by the very act that you're doing something different, of course, on some level, you've judged […] that choice to be somehow problematic. […] this is really hard to navigate with your relationships with people. […] that's the stuff I I find really uncomfortable, like for people to feel like I might think that I'm better than them or all of that sort of smugness stuff"* [388-402]

Several participants had completely stopped revealing their eco-anxiety to their families, while others felt it was important to "not leave family behind." Others mentioned "downplaying their values" to "soften" the responses their eco-anxiety might elicit. Maple: "I'll just hide it or not talk about it […] highlight my contradictions or whatever in order to soften that." Some participants shared that knowing when to speak up can be difficult. For example, Pine shared being "torn between wanting to tell everybody and at the same time not" feeling "damned if you do and "damned if don't." Participants who

seemed confident in speaking about climate change described taking a relational approach: holding in mind the capacity of the other, meeting their responses with genuine curiosity, balancing judgement of others with how they would like to be treated, and being careful to disagree without losing the relationship. Willow talked about using 'nonviolent communication' (Rosenberg & Chopra, 2015) to empathise with and connect with people by acknowledging others' anger and demonstrating genuine interest in their experience. Participants agreed that "waking people up" "with a sledgehammer" does not work. Some participants talked about valuing connection and "not leaving people behind" as being more important than agreeing. Hazel shared, "I just realised that actually if I'm going to live those values, then I need to live [with] ... I need to think about healthy relationships."

Most participants highlighted that taking breaks to restore energy, revaluate and manage busyness was part of the natural "ebb and flow" of living awake. Examples of this included moments of "shutting off" or numbing to allow rest and recalibration through reading fiction, watching TV, or retreating from action. Birch talked about taking time to "question if these values were serving me" and explained how momentarily withdrawing could lead to insight and self-awareness before reconnecting with feelings. This was built upon by Willow, who described the toll of busyness on integrity.

> Willow**:** *"I think when you're busy, it's a way of subduing that that eco-anxiety. You know, it's just like it's like comfort eating and you just do your lists and you tick them off […] it somehow calms you down, but of course all you are doing is putting a lid on something that needs to come up anyway. […] I do believe every feeling needs to be fully felt. And you're doing a yourself a great disservice if you do, you know, numb up with alcohol or food or busyness"* [467-473]

Several participants highlighted how remaining in community can prevent "frozen stuckness", denial-induced confusion, and brain fog. Hawthorne stated, "action without connection and love is relentless, grim, and miserable."

4.4.4 *Collectively Grieving and Loving Towards a Better Life: Stewarding Awareness and Holding Uncertainty with Deep Joy and Pain*

Most participants attributed their emotional tolerance in facing the climate crisis to growing through the experience of eco-anxiety because it "amplifies the feelings we have been avoiding." Participants defined emotional tolerance as recognising feelings as a valid response to something and messages that are important to listen to. Thus, allowing eco-anxiety to "speak" rather than repress it was regarded by participants as vital for

finding clarity. However, the cost of feeling more was difficult, especially following a long history of "bottling feelings" or growing up in a culture that taught emotions undermine productivity. Being "emotionally tolerant" was distinguished from being "an emotional wreck" as being internally awake to emotions that help with noticing being moved by both beauty and pain. A few participants with over five years of experience facing the climate crisis reflected on how their capacity for pain and joy had increased together, as did their experience of 'fullness' in their lives.

> Willow: *"It's such such an honour and good fortune to be able to feel pain, to be honest, because it's never all pain, because the more pain you feel, the more you get the switch side of the love and the beauty and the wonder, you know, and you can't live with one without the other. […] this search for happiness is bullshit. You've got to have the really deep, painful bits."* [547-552]

Love was named as a driving force of facing climate change because loving more "meant more connectedness." Juniper shared, "it's about love, I know it sounds awful but it's about love. It's love, actually, only love is going to get us through this, is going to keep us going."

> Hawthorne: *"What does keep me grounded is community and your love of life, that's what we're protecting. […] Otherwise, it just becomes so relentless, so miserable, so grim that you would just fall off the edge and that coming together into the streets and showing love and showing and showing care and showing joy for each other and the planet... Some people don't get but I do. It's got to be part of it. In a way, we're hopefully creating a society that's that we could, that we need to create ..."* [217-223]

Participants' descriptions of love varied and included: caring about those who are more vulnerable, especially those in low-income countries that are already suffering more (including Mozambique, Philippines, India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Kenya) and dying because of Western abuse of the planet and people; caring about inequality becoming worse as a result of COVID-19; and reconnecting to our relational entanglement with nature and realising the significance of the disaster that is unfolding; nurturing and caring for "even the little things", while not holding hope they will live forever.

> Beech**:** **"***how deeply connected, it is to love. […] It's kind of inexplicable, the emotion that comes up […] I believe it's difficult to express because when it's not something in our culture that is very natural or practiced for us to express talking about. […] deep, deep sense of gratitude and, um remorse it doesn't feel very linked to the thought process at all. It's a very deep. Um. Have a sense of awe and [pause] [sniffles] very humbling feeling. […] it's very hard to connect to that feeling alone."* [99-107]

Juniper described developing deep joy and gratitude to build capacity to be with "the loss", care, and not grow cold-hearted. Participants shared how the process of grief naturally leads to gratitude for "what is" and what might not always be. Practical examples included allowing "gratitude and remorse to mix" with moments of deep connection with self, the Earth, and people. Several participants shared experiences with community and loved ones that moved them towards strengthening, life-expanding values such as being inspired over being comfortable, quality of life over financial gain, and being challenged over positive reinforcement of thinking. Participants described feeling grateful for their journey of experiencing eco-anxiety because it "forced me to see what is really precious" and, through deep learning and growth, "made me who I am today."

Several participants described being comforted and soothed by the practice of noticing nature's patterns, which are mirrored within ourselves as humans, and therefore how "that which is healing for me is healing for the planet."

> Beech: *"I find it really comforting and soothing the more I learn about patterns in nature. And. The way that branching structures repeated in..the tree roots, […] the mycorrhizal networks are very similar to the bronichia in our lungs and the nervous systems and, you know, these same patterns in coral and lycan and. It will all be repeated in our interactions with each other as well."* [230-234]

Self-compassion was highlighted as important in enabling compassion towards others. Examples of this included: not holding judgement and anger towards others, not "acting to defend my position", and seeking to understand why people are defensive, "shut down", and "making fun of me." Several participants talked about doing mental preparation, so they are more likely to be compassionate and maintain their humanity "when social collapse happens."

> Willow**:** *"there's a fire in a in a theatre or a cinema […] you can either go clambering over everyone's bodies to try get out first to save your own skin, or you might try and pick some people up on the way that are more vulnerable than you on the way and help them."* [195-198]

> Maple: *"But I guess what keeps me kind of focused and thinking about this, is how do we […] get through this without turning against each other? […] Where turning against each other feels like quite a high probability. And I mean, it already happens, it happens anyway with people, but like on a profoundly global scale."* [242-245]

Several participants explicitly highlighted their cautiousness about not judging others, because they recognised how easy and unhelpful this is. For example, participants talked about feeling no ill will towards those who attack them when doing activism because they fought to hold a respectful attitude. Participants explained that this position of compassion was made possible by remaining mindful and accepting of the limits of where people are and can be. Hazel observed, "we are all just humans at different stages" and problematic choices are not the person. Participants who shared they knew what it is like to suffer talked about the importance of empathy and taking seriously the danger of becoming cold towards others' pain by no longer feeling it personally. Participants shared their belief that empathy is integral to seeing everyone as humans rather than "adversaries" and observed there are structural reasons beyond individuals' control that can explain why people "hear" or do not. Beech and Birch described the societal wilful ignorance of the climate crisis as a function of our "existential disease" and "our disconnection" which can be healed by realising our "dependency on each other, including nature."

Participants talked about finding acceptance in knowing they "have tried" and "it is enough" to inspire each other to be our best selves, and they, therefore, can anticipate "feeling OK" when things unravel.

> Beech**:** *"Just try and be our best selves, then that has a ripple effect and there's great power in that and that's all we can do. And. And that is enough […] it's the most powerful thing we can do […] to inspire other people to be their best self."* [141-144]

Rather than coming to a place of certainty about the appropriate action to take, participants described noticing the importance of not discounting the value of their own (1 in 7.8 billion) contribution. Most participants talked about the significance of everyone's contributions and appreciating that everyone has varying capacity and capabilities to play a larger or smaller part in the whole. This perspective seemed to be underpinned by the belief that they are one person "held within our interconnectedness," and their contribution will always be in the context of relationship with others who are adding different approaches to building collective understanding for new societal structures. Hazel described picturing "pockets of light", communities doing things

differently, and finding comfort in the belief that people are doing the best they can despite the fact that most people are struggling in their own way.

> Hazel: *"And so I just always am trying to sit in this 'middle place' of unknowing and hope that we can just, […] somehow have more connecting experience with each other in the Earth. […] But I think it will happen in pockets and I think the pockets will grow. And the image I have is like a sort of interconnected web where they'll just be pockets of this happening and that they'll grow and then they'll get connected. […] It's like those satellite images in space at night."* [350-362]

Participants shared how difficult tolerating uncertainty can be, particularly when feeling distress, living through an unprecedented pandemic, or simply "wanting to know if my children will grow old." Rather than holding hope for a specific outcome, almost all participants talked about allowing space for grief, so uncertainty could be given room through the support of being in nature or close relationships. Befriending uncertainty and "unknowingness" was described as requiring acknowledging it, acting on what we do know, and remembering that "knowing too much can be damaging" because it can make it more challenging to be present.

> Birch: *"a kind of a place where you in some ways kind of stepped slightly outside of things in a way that allows you to be with them and yet also hold a kind of a perspective that is almost like as if the world has stopped for just a moment"* [619-622]

A few participants described feeling their personal journey of eco-anxiety had only just begun, because there is always more grief, and always more to love and care for. Willow shared, "The well of tears is never going to dry because it's just so massive and it's totally ongoing." Participants talked about how life with eco-anxiety is better, because living aligned to values "that are far more resonant and fair" has led to a "fuller life"; a deeper, more difficult, but richer experience of living.

> Willow: *"yes, it's absolutely terrifying ... But when you walk through that wall of fear coming out on the other side, it's like there's a new beginning. And it's actually better than before you walked through it. […] you are kind of in a different world, but it's a much richer world because living in kind of soft-denial is like being […] switched off. […] you're not fully alive and it's only when you truly engage with it, that you wake up and live differently ... you know that cliché: 'you've seen the light'"* [720-728]

Participants shared that they hoped to live in a less patriarchal and more connected way that was built on principles of democracy, cooperation, and regenerative systems. All participants highlighted that their next steps for applying their learning were rarely

obvious and laden with sacrifice and missteps towards gradually living differently. Although their experience had not become comfortable or easy, participants shared that "when we are kind and respectful to each other", we can move towards a thriving world that is open and expansive, and this is worth pursuing because "we are all each other's keeper."

5 Chapter Five: Discussion

5.1 Chapter Five Overview

In this chapter, I explain how my analysis complements, extends, and challenges key ideas in the emerging literature base (Bryant & Charmaz, 2019). I critically assess the rigour and quality of this research and examine clinical implications that require further research exploration. I thereby seek to illuminate this rigorous and determined attempt to perform Charmaz's (2014) CGT. In the introduction, I argued the importance of understanding the experience of "waking up" to climate change given its relevance to central tenets of counselling psychology: social justice issues and a contextual understanding of wellbeing. This research asked, "what is the experience of eco-anxiety for individuals who have experienced an ecopsychology support group for facing the climate crisis?" This chapter addresses the questions of pathology and intervention for eco-anxiety by suggesting this experience should be supported and celebrated as a lively and helpful response to our global context of shared crisis.

5.2 Interpretation of Findings in Relation to Literature and Theory on Facing the Climate Crisis

5.2.1 *Not a Pathological Experience*

As supported by literature (Hickman, 2020; Hogg et al., 2021), the experience of eco-anxiety was understood by all participants as a rational and natural psychological response to climate change. Participants reported no pre-existing mental health conditions or Freudian-esk hysteria (Pihkala, 2020). Furthermore, because of the systemic social injustice issues perpetuating the problem of climate change, the experience of eco-anxiety was believed to be a "sign of life" and a "resilient concern" (Dodds, 2021; Verplanken et al., 2020). Therefore, eco-anxiety should not be considered a sign of "illness" unless counselling psychology first adopts an alternative stance on "maladjustment" in mental health in general. Martin Luther King stated, "I am proud to be maladjusted" to systems of abuse and uncare that endorse luxury for the few at the cost of life for the many (Western Michigan University, 2021, p.17-18).

5.2.2 *The Problem of Terminology*

Climate psychology is a fast-growing field dominated by positivist frameworks (Cianconi et al., 2020; Stanley et al., 2021; Verplanken et al., 2020) and Western psychological theory (Dodds, 2012; Hoggett, 2019; Orange, 2016; Weintrobe, 2021). The appropriate language to describe this experience has been debated.

5.2.2.1 **Multifaceted Experience.** Pihkala (2020) and Hickman's (2020) definition of eco-anxiety was used for this research, given its broad and non-pathologizing approach. In line with these definitions, participants described their experience using terms like "chronic fear" of both environmental doom and social collapse. A spectrum of emotional experience and a host of complex psychosocial processes were highlighted, illustrating more than a simple threat, fear, or anxiety response (e.g. Ballman, 2020; Hogg et al., 2021; Stanley et al., 2021).

5.2.2.2 **Problematic Aspects of 'Eco-anxiety'.** Participants disagreed on the term "eco-anxiety" as the preferred descriptor for facing the climate crisis for three reasons. Firstly, Pihkala's definition only included climate change and failed to address the spectrum of concerning environmental problems perpetuated by anthropogenic environmental abuse. Secondly, many participants stated eco-anxiety has simplifying and pathologising connotations and deceptively overemphasises anxiety when grief, sorrow and anger might be equally valid descriptors. Thirdly, because eco-anxiety was described as an intense and traumatic experience (Kaplan, 2020), participants considered eco-anxiety too 'weak' a term. For example, a few participants found terms such as eco-dread or eco-terror more resonant. However, in agreement with Hogg et al. (2021), several participants argued that overcomplicating the processes with obscure labels for different emotions was reductive at best and academically elitist at worst.

5.2.2.3 **How We Use the Term 'Eco-Anxiety' Is More Important.** While participants highlighted problems with the term eco-anxiety, none opposed the term being included in the research title with the understanding that this was to give voice to their experience rather than perpetuate pathologising of experience. Most participants believed careful use of the term determines its utility and is more important than avoiding the problematic word 'anxiety' altogether. One participant, Oak, eloquently stated anxiety denotes alarm to threat and while we don't have the perfect language yet, using what is an increasingly popular term in the literature (Verplanken et al., 2020) allows for greater dialogue until more people are hearing the alarm that we are in an emergency. For example, there are

arguably many problematic aspects of the term 'BAME' which stands for Black, Asian and Minority, Ethnicities (Khunti et al., 2020), but it is still used with the caveats that: it problematically refers to skin colour as synonymous with geographical location; is grossly limited in representing the breadth of diversity, experience, and ethnic minorities and; is othering (Aspinall, 2021; Cousins, 2019; Egeli, 2021). Discontented, reluctant use of the term 'eco-anxiety' might therefore promote mindfulness in its application until more appropriate language emerges. Perhaps the attention eco-anxiety has gained from clinicians who work within "realist" paradigms, and binary perspectives of pathology is helpful, welcome or important given it promotes responses from those working in the dominant systems of mental health to engage (e.g. Royal College of Psychiatrists, 2021).

Climate psychology language reflects and shapes thinking about climate change and primes us to conceptualise the world in particular ways (Andrews, 2018, 2019). As the lexicon of climate vocabulary continues to grow in complexity (Cianconi et al., 2020), this language acquires meaning (Bryant & Charmaz, 2019) "from its use" within human interactions (Gergen, 1999 p.26). The arguments put forward by participants around "utility over intrinsic semantics alone" validated the methodological and epistemological approach of this research in which society is viewed as existing as both objective and subjective realities and is chiefly "concerned with how knowledge is constructed and understood" (Andrews, 2012 p.44). Therefore, focusing on the "interaction between people and how they use language to construct reality" (Andrews, 2012, p.44) meant psycho-social practices around this increasingly popular term in the literature (Verplanken et al., 2020) was an important starting place to address the question of how eco-anxiety is constructed. This was based upon subjective accounts of the experience rather than a set of behaviours or "quantified" units of distress.

5.2.3 *More Complex than a Spectrum of Emotions*

5.2.3.1 **A Deepening Spiral of Experience.** As extant literature and research suggested, a spectrum of "negative" and "positive" emotions was reported. Anxiety, grief, sorrow, trauma, and terror was used to describe the experience as well as joy, an "opening", and waking up to caring about the suffering of humanity and nature. Rather than progressive stages on a linear spectrum, participants provided support for Hawkins and Ryde's (2019) model that suggested the experience was cyclical. Much like the WTR model (Macy & Brown, 2014), eco-anxiety was described as a deepening spiral of evolving psychosocial experiences. However, in follow-up interviews, participants stressed that often several

parts or emotions of the theoretical diagram were experienced simultaneously or not necessarily in the order outlined. The current research findings do not agree with previous research suggestions (Stanley et al., 2021) for further exploration into how people might harness particular 'constructive' emotions (like anger) that promote action without heightening other 'unconstructive' emotions associated with the experience, such as 'depression' or 'anxiety.' Neither the appealing clarity of a binary view of emotions as positive and negative nor a linear progression through stages of experience was found in the results. Participants highlighted the importance of a rich rather than "instantly sweet" experience of life. "Being with" grief, which may have appeared as depression in some research studies, was highlighted by six participants as a necessary process to move towards strategic action into congruency with internal values while avoiding "knee-jerk" threat responses.

Participants compared climate grief with comparisons to bereavement and previous experiences of loss. As suggested by Comtesse et al. (2021), participants' descriptions of processing this grief involved resistance, disruption, and adaption through identity integration and reprioritising life around this "opening." Comtesse et al. (2021) highlighted an important aspect often overlooked in the climate literature: personal identity work of grief responses made more complicated by a loss that is ever-increasing and is already larger than seems fathomable. Therefore, avoiding the "depressing" parts of the experience was believed to not only be unhelpful, but also very difficult if one is honestly "facing the crisis we are in" with personal care and attention. These findings corroborate the recommendation of Stanley et al. (2021) to study "eco-emotions" and their interactions holistically rather than in isolation. Participants' narratives highlighted that emotions were believed to be better understood in their interconnectedness and were worthy of empathic attention to learn from and act on them. Both "big" to "small" emotions and private or public actions were all believed to be valid even in their apparent "smallness." Equally, disengagement or taking breaks from action were also seen as unavoidable and useful parts of the process if done in connection with others and with a capacity for uncertainty. This attitude of valuing emotional self-awareness and growth over productivity contrasts with the dominant behavioural focus of existing eco-anxiety research and the current political climate of productivity and profit over people (Macy & Brown, 2014; Weintrobe, 2021).

5.2.3.2 **Connecting the Dots of Systemic Injustice and Personal Care.** Mihaylov and Perkins (2015) explained that the environmental justice movement is based on a two-way

relationship: “protecting the environment is a social justice activity because marginalised communities are hit hardest by pollution” and “it is the social, economic and power marginalisation of communities that opens weak spots in the enforcement of environmental protection” (p.124). As highlighted in the literature, participants agreed that climate change is political in nature and debate around the type of response required makes it a sensitive topic (Pihkala, 2020). UK poll data (Public Interest Research Council, 2020) suggested that most people in the UK understand climate change to be a big and complex problem and believe the status quo is not serving them. This was similar to many participants described starting points in their journey of facing the climate crisis. Furthermore, in line with the poll research (Public Interest Research Council, 2020), some participants did not initially understand how social justice issues or colonialism related to the climate crisis without explicitly learning about this. Because of this, many participants stressed how important it is to thoughtfully connect the dots of how multiple oppressions intersect to personally ‘wake up’ to the severity of the climate crisis.

5.2.4 *Waking Up to Values and ‘True Self’*

5.2.4.1 **Swinging from Big Picture to Personal Picture While Holding Uncertainty.** Many participants talked seamlessly about human and other-than-human justice issues pertaining to the private, the local, and the global impacts of climate change, all in the same breath. This integration of perspectives was highlighted as an important part of learning about climate change that invited a caring personal response. Noticing care for the climate crisis through resonating with others when talking about it and noticing the emotions activated was likened to realising what had been inside all along. This could be compared with the description of Strohminger et al. (2017) of noticing “one’s true self”: characteristics or parts of the self which are judged as making people who they ‘really are’, ‘deep down’, which are often positive and “moral.” In contrast to the behaviourally focused literature (Carmi et al., 2015; Nabi et al., 2018), emotional activation following discovering clarity about how public and systemic issues intersect with the personal did not equate to clarity about behaviour. In fact, participants described holding “great uncertainty” about what type of action they should take and often referred to their many determined actions as “better than nothing.” A further divergence from behaviourally focused research was the lack of binary valuing of action or inaction. Participants described “stepping back” then “stepping up” and then “back again” as all-important. Participants’ internally motivated and collectively minded integration of personal and

public perspectives seemed countercultural to the individualist neoliberal performative culture prevalent in the UK (Weintrobe, 2021).

5.2.4.2 **Not Looking to Western Solutions but Valuing Their Own Contribution.** Many participants held critical and questioning attitudes towards Western ideas about coping with eco-anxiety. For example, in contrast to poll research (Public Interest Research Council, 2020), several participants believed solutions could not come from "global North" ideas or technological solutions. In fact, those who had "been awake" to the climate crisis for more than 10 years believed the "global South" held more answers. Seeking exact answers about finding "solutions" was markedly absent in participants' narratives. Rather than hoping for technological solutions to climate change, participants seemed to value, with humility, their own contributions no matter how small. Unsurprisingly, this seems to consistent with the values of the WTR process that encourages humility, systems thinking, and "seeing with new eyes" the overlooked actions and contexts we live among. Rather than hoping for rules and policies that steer change in individual behaviours, participants emphasised a values-based approach, giving more attention to internal and external honouring of increasing conscious awareness.

5.2.4.3 **Biospheric Values.** Ten of the fourteen studies included in the literature review highlighted the importance of values for solidarity and relatedness with all living "things", including the environment. All participants also highlighted this. It is not surprising, therefore that all participants described holding biospheric values. Not only was nature relatedness valued for its intrinsic and instrumental utility, but participants also reported holding more relational values of nature. This meant attending the WTR group and maintaining conscious awareness of climate change encouraged them to think about their two-way relationship with nature, noticing its non-substitutability and our reciprocity with it (Himes & Muraca, 2018; Mattijssen et al., 2020). Such awareness of reciprocity has been highlighted among activists, scientists, and indigenous communities in the climate literature. The belief we should care for and look after nature has been largely neglected in psychology research (Diver et al., 2019; Gould et al., 2019; Mattijssen et al., 2020). Four participants talked about holding biospheric values from an early age and seven stated how relational values for nature had become more important following "waking-up" to the climate crisis because this "waking-up" was an opening to realising their interconnectedness with nature and considering the subjectivities of animals, and plants (Cunsolo & Landman, 2017). Nature seemed to support participants'

regenerative relationships of care, where experiencing both joy and sadness built their capacity for grief and love (Fritze et al., 2008).

Just as Clayton and Karazsia (2020), Helm et al. (2018), and Verplanken et al. (2020) suggested biospheric values or a "green" identity may promote wellbeing and provide support for the more difficult aspects of climate anxiety, several participants talked about the importance of being with nature to renew them emotionally, even though this often involved a bitter-sweet experience (Koger, 2015). Several participants described nature inviting them to a deeper sense of personal affinity to the devastation of nature. In this way, rather than biospheric concern being predictive of "ecological stress" (Helm et al., 2018), perhaps a more complicated and bidirectional relationship exists between "cognitive, affective, and self" and biospheric values (Verplanken et al., 2020, p.27). Eco-anxiety may be strengthened through and regenerated by a deep reverence for nature and social justice. Nature may also build distress tolerance as its beauty may simultaneously activate painful reminders of its impermanence and ongoing planetary loss. Similarly, four participants mentioned being with nature as an important support for "being with" difficult and painful aspects of eco-anxiety, especially in the absence of community or other support, where eco-anxiety was otherwise described as a "punishing" and "ostracizing" experience.

5.2.5 *'Being With' Emotions, Nature and Each Other is Vital*

5.2.5.1 **Intrapersonal Support.** Participants talked about building an emotional toolbox to support their intrapersonal functioning so facing the severity of the climate crisis could be experienced in all its "positive" and "negative" emotionality (Burke, & Blashki, 2020; Verplanken et al., 2020). Rather than promoting the presence of "positive emotions" or reappraising climate change to reduce "negative thinking" (Ojala, 2013), participants highlighted themes of growth (Verplanken & Holland, 2002; Verplanken & Sui, 2019) and distress tolerance in being with their grief, anger and anxiety (Hickman, 2020; Verplanken et al., 2020).

5.2.5.2 **'Being With' Rather Than Hoping for a Particular Future.** In contrast to the climate psychology literature (Bury et al., 2020; Ojala, 2013), "being with" the severity of climate change consequences was more important than building hope for a particular outcome. One participant described hope as a deadening block to "truly facing" the climate crisis because it requires denial and disavowal and serves as a shortcut out of the growth process

of waking up to what is occurring. Several participants agreed that holding onto ideas of potential futures in the name of hope was unhelpful and that uncertainty was more important than "comfort" for learning how to "be with" eco-anxiety. For participants who did hold hope, the object of hope related to themes of being present, enjoying connection with what/who is still alive and hoping that, at the end of their lives, they can look back knowing they have done their best. No participant talked about imagined personal or collective futures for humanity with any certainty. This lack of avoidance or hopeful disavowal seemed particularly countercultural to the current UK culture of "exceptionalism" perpetuated by neoliberalism (Weintrobe, 2021, p.29). Weintrobe (2021) highlighted that exceptionalism is the belief that we in the UK will be the exception and that we are "entitled to be spared" (p.117) because of our specialness. Examples of this culture can be seen within UK government policy, institutional racism, and limited refugee aid (Weintrobe, 2021). This might explain why many participants did not find hope to be useful; hope can easily morph into mindlessly defaulting to mindsets of exceptionalism that we are constantly exposed to in the UK. Nurturing personal care and creating regenerative systems of care is vital for us to collectively face the inherent threat to our survival presented by the climate crisis (Westwell & Bunting, 2020). This tentativeness and the outright rejection of hope for the avoidance of disaster relates to the Becker (2011) Terror Management Theory that suggests surviving our thoughts about mortality necessitates a form of denial. This theory was first applied to eco-anxiety by Pihkala (2018) who highlighted climate change as posing a significant threat to mortality, and therefore strong psychological defences may seek to manage this through the obscuring of self-knowledge or the 'true self' that cares. Behavioural research to date has seemingly underestimated the psychological and interpersonal support required to build an emotional toolbox, which participants highlighted was essential to work through internal conflicts towards knowing the caring and afraid parts of themselves, which need to be integrated for eco-anxiety to be regeneratively sustained.

5.2.5.3 **Grieving.** Participants shared their necessary "honest confronting" of their grief was facilitated by the support of others and a stable life situation. The ecopsychology literature distinguishes between grieving the loss of human relationships and the loss of place, land, waterscapes, and all that lived in them (Cunsolo & Landman, 2017). Experiencing the latter kind of grief outstrips a person's capacity to thoughtfully grieve each of the collective losses experienced. Many participants talked about how "grief needs a witness" and how they valued receiving support from like-minded others and "wisdom keepers"

to help with feeling frozen in grief or disavowal. As urged by Hickman (2020), four participants described their need to find language to talk about their experience and process this collectively. Participants suggested non-Western approaches to be particularly helpful in providing language and frameworks for making sense of and processing grief. For example, participants mentioned the following approaches as integral to their grieving: building ritual and ceremony into daily practice; avoiding abstract impersonal information about climate change; deepening their personal connection with nature; and making space to notice how their emotions were pointing towards wisdom (Cunsolo et al., 2020). Although emotionally costly and time-intensive, participants stated growth is inevitable for those who do not "check out" of a supportive community because it is life-affirming to witness and be witnessed in grief. This supports Pihkala's (2020) suggestion that those who do not use denial and disavowal to cope with eco-anxiety can experience personal growth and develop resilience towards remaining awake to the climate crisis.

5.2.5.4 **Self-awareness Over Judgements of Others.** Participants noted experiencing the "backlash effect" from others who felt they have enough problems and need to look after themselves first (Public Interest Research Council, 2020). Rather than judging the uncaring responses of others, most participants talked about being in a privileged position to take the time to notice that they care without turning on themselves or others in guilt. "Macro" worries about society and the world appeared alongside statements of self-transcendence and values for benevolence (Schwartz et al., 2000). As adeptly stated by Verplanken et al. (2020), the issue of privilege may explain how "macro" issues of climate change do not become "micro" worries as they might do on the "front lines" of climate change or in low-income countries. Further to acknowledging their privilege, there was cautiousness in participants' use of language to avoid promoting judgement and generalisations about others.

5.2.5.5 **Compassion for People Not Systems.** In contrast to the literature, for those with more than ten years' experience of facing climate change, empathy and compassion featured in their narratives (Harris, 2020) far more than a pessimistic view of human nature. In fact, many participants focused on how systems are wrong rather than the "innately flawed and greedy humans." Many participants talked about holding a high value for empathy, self-awareness, and self-development; many had taken courses in social justice, social work, mental health, or ecopsychology. Similarly, participants did not reference "developing nations" or the "global South" with vague or dehumanising language but

instead used specific names of countries they were referring to. Participants also used metaphors to bring to life the centuries-old pattern of high-income countries like the UK fuelling exploitation for their own ends, including supporting the dominance of the fossil fuel industry. Participants linked the need for collective "system redesign" to their highly challenging "internal identity redesign."

5.2.5.6 **Therapeutic Support.** Participants emphasised the importance of therapeutic support in regeneratively sustaining eco-anxiety towards significant personal growth and strengthening of their 'true self' (Verplanken et al., 2020, p.26). Participants also highlighted the value of therapeutic input in managing their existential anxiety about what actions felt meaningful and resonant for them (Burke, & Blashki, 2020).

5.2.6 *Growth, Group Action, Group Connection, and Love*

5.2.6.1 **Group Support Through Connection.** As suggested in the literature, group support was highlighted as particularly important in building capacity to move through the spectrum of eco-anxiety emotions towards connection and action (Cunsolo et al., 2020). WTR groups provided emotional tools for all participants towards being with the nuanced and difficult parts of eco-anxiety, without fracturing into "frozen" stuckness. The danger of a "frozen" state has been highlighted in existing literature about facing the climate crisis (Climate Psychology Alliance, 2021; Lewis et al., 2020). Although action was a part of everyone's process, identity development, relatedness, and integration of inner conflicts seemed to moderate this process. The focus of WTR groups was described as less about "output" or PEBs, but instead as a regenerative inside-out process (Gibbons, 2020). In this way, action was a natural outflow of congruence with values and expanding consciousness. Echoing Büchs et al. (2015) feedback study, participants reported valuing having spaces to share, reflect, and work through their internal conflicts. Being heard was more important for participants than reducing affect (Hickman, 2020) because connecting with others and being heard promoted growth and clarity about action.

5.2.6.2 **Role of Action.** Echoing Ballman's (2020) findings, all participants reported engaging in public environmental behaviour, but not necessarily front-line activism. As suggested by Ballman (2020), the shared sense of purpose and peer support experienced when engaging in public environmental behaviours was reportedly emotionally regulative and "deepened" the experience of eco-anxiety for those with high levels of nature relatedness but did not reduce feelings of eco-fear. These findings supported the argument of Hogg

et al. (2021) that environmental behaviour is not an independently compelling indicator of eco-anxiety (Pihkala, 2018; Reser & Swim, 2011); instead, participants' motivation to act was moderated by social identity, social support, and personal resolve (Fielding et al., 2008). Most participants highlighted their complicated relationships with activism and social action. Relating to the identity of "activist", if at all, presented identity-based challenges to participants despite their strong values for nature and feelings of eco-anxiety. Therefore, the binary categorisation of "front line activist" and "non-activist" did not resonate with participants who instead recognised a spectrum of public action identities which included "bad activist", "not-front-lines activist", and "reluctant activist". It appears research to date has overlooked the spectrum of identities associated with public action. Further to the diversity of action-oriented identities, the emotional and psychological toll of climate action and the potential for regenerative activism have not featured significantly in climate psychology research (Westwell & Bunting, 2020).

5.2.6.3 **Role of Community.** Chen et al. (2020) argued that those facing the climate crisis greatly benefit from the social capital gains of community. As highlighted by existing research (Hathaway, 2016; Johnstone, 2019; Macy & Brown, 2014), WTR groups were helpful for participants because of the collective sharing, ritual, and ceremony they provided that enabled them to honour their shared feelings and notice how much they cared. Learning spiritual practices and ecopsychology language that acknowledge our interconnectedness helped participants share their experiences and deepen their sense of relatedness with self (Dodds, 2012; Orange, 2016), like-minded others (Burke & Blashki, 2020; Hoggett, 2019; Prentice, 2003), and nature (Koger, 2015; Plotkin, 2010). This sense of belonging was particularly important for participants as they faced challenges navigating shifts in their social identities when sharing about the climate crisis with the 'unconverted' (Büchs et al. 2015; Budziszewska & Jonsson, 2021). Ironically, finding 'awake' communities seemed to support individuals to sustain relationships with those still 'asleep'. The positive emotional resources provided by this sense of community helped reduce participants' sense of loneliness and promote regeneratively sustainable engagement with eco-anxiety through connection (Gibbons, 2020).

5.3 Critical Review

5.3.1 *Limitations of Interpretive, Non-Generalisable Theory*

It is important to note that the research findings are not a 'true representation' of the data gathered, but a co-construction of my understanding (and biases) and my participants' understanding expressed through our online interactions. Therefore, the current study does not offer a model of eco-anxiety that is generalisable to all participants of WTR groups. However, at the time of writing, it is the first study to offer a social constructionist theoretical understanding of eco-anxiety based on in-depth accounts of personal experience.

5.3.2 *Limitations of Sample*

This study was constrained by a small sample size of mostly Caucasian participants. This was a failing of the study, particularly given the social justice context of the climate crisis. The danger of colonising understanding of this experience will continue if we fail to presence ethnic minorities' experiences of eco-anxiety. Due to the time-limited recruitment process, I was unable to recruit a more diverse sample. The issue of ethnicity remained in our minds during interviews and follow-up interviews. Participants mentioned their concern about the lack of representation of 'BAME' communities in the climate movement, whose voices have not been adequately represented in the co-construction of language about responding to the crisis.

Members of the public who have attended a WTR group are likely to be of a particular socio-economic status (given the time and cost to attend) and demographic (based on anecdotal observations and conversations with group facilitators). The issue of privilege was raised by nine participants when describing how privileged they were to be able to first spend time learning about climate change and secondly to have the agency to reorganise their lives around their values for environmental and social justice. Further research is needed to explore the broader social and economic moderating factors relevant to the experience of facing the climate crisis. Individuals that have sought to build their emotional capacity to be with their eco-anxiety through attending WTR groups will have different understandings and mental health needs from those who have not sought support.

Working with participants who had varying levels of psychological knowledge was challenging. Two participants had completed doctorate level psychological training: one in counselling psychology and another in clinical psychology. Four participants had engaged in self-directed learning about psychological concepts such as 'trauma', 'emotional intelligence', and 'non-violent communication'. Five participants talked about practising empathy for friends and family members experiencing mental health difficulties such as depression, anxiety, and PTSD in relation to their experience of living on a suffering planet. This range of psychological knowledge introduced greater complexity to coding and theory construction, in addition to their varied experiences of eco-anxiety. This was important to discuss in research supervision to ensure participants' voices were elevated in a way that was aligned to the social justice values underpinning the research. For example, the term 'trauma' was mentioned by one psychologist participant and three other participants. Therefore, the word 'trauma' was included in the coding of the data. However, the research process consistently prioritised construction of theory that would be accessible to a non-psychological audience and elevated the voices of participants who would otherwise be unlikely to be represented within existing academic literature.

5.3.3 *Limitations of the Term Climate Change*

The term 'climate change' overlooks other environmental crises and ecological devastation. While these issues all intersect, it is important to note that several participants felt their response to the climate crisis was not just about climate change alone but about all loss and devastation occurring as a result of anthropogenic damage to and degradation of the Earth and its inhabitants.

5.3.4 *Limitations of the Political and Global Health Context of Findings*

This study was situated in a particular period in politics and public health. Participant recruitment began after COVID-19 had become a serious global concern. Although there is research (Verplanken et al., 2020) to suggest concern about climate change is insensitive to COVID-19 context, poll data suggests fear has increased in the UK (Steentjes et al., 2021) and COVID-19 highlighted how unprepared we are to face the climate crisis (Geiger et al., 2021). Due to social distancing measures, issues of action and both social and nature connection (as highlighted heavily in the data) were impacted.

Furthermore, capacity to reflect seemed to manifest as increased conscious awareness of how entangled we are with the environment (Sheldrake, 2020), and how systems of oppression and abuse are exacerbated times of crisis (Bednarek, 2021). For example, some research suggests reflection on systems was highlighted by the "good faith" observed in the UK during the early months of COVID-19 in response to the enormous disruption (Public Interest Research Council, 2020). As a result, some may have believed more systemic change was possible, but this was evidently not modelled by world leaders (Weintrobe, 2021). Four participants noted how inequality became clearer during this time because we were weathering the 'same storm' but not in the 'same boat' for both COVID-19 and the climate crisis.

Furthermore, it is important to locate the current research within the political climate of uncertainty as participants awaited the outcome of the 2020 United States presidential election. In follow-up interviews, participants shared they had noticed their anxiety 'change shape' following those elections and the emerging potential of a "green new deal" to address the climate crisis. Four further socio-political events that shaped participants experiences were: Extinction Rebellion gaining continued news media coverage and public awareness and dialogue incorporating a broader range of political ideas; the Black Lives Matter movement in response to insufferable racist violence against black people (Sobo et al., 2020); Idle No More in response to insufferable racist violence against indigenous communities; and the Me Too movement against insufferable misogynistic violence against women (Weintrobe, 2021). Six participants explicitly noted their increased conscious awareness of how internalised racism and white privilege (Ryde, 2019) are perpetuating the climate crisis (Sealey-Huggins, 2018). Three participants reflected on the horrors of colonialism moving into public consciousness in a way that is unprecedented as an encouraging sign. For example, as recognition of racist systems increases, the link between racism and colonialism (an ideology arguably responsible for the climate crisis) may be easier for people to understand (Public Interest Research Council, 2020). Further research is needed to explore how climate injustice and issues of race and class impact on the experience of eco-anxiety and equity in facing the climate crisis.

5.3.5 *Limitations of Grounded Theory Approach*

Abstracting theory is limited because it cannot fully capture the enormity and fluidity of a human experience. Although the findings have been provided in a story, the richness

that could be gleaned from a storytelling approach (Carlin, 2010) has been sacrificed for the purpose of drawing on all participant stories. Therefore, the utility of the proposed theoretical understanding of eco-anxiety is rooted in personal use and application by the reader, and not in any explanatory power. The findings have been mapped onto the growth patterns of fungi to highlight the fluidity and context-dependence of this experience (see Appendix K). All research findings are offered in the hope that they are understood to be far more fluid than any single diagram could imply.

5.3.6 *Quality of Research*

To ensure quality, I referred to Charmaz and Thornberg's (2020) criteria of credibility, resonance, transparency, originality, and usefulness. Within these categories I drew on the quality criterion for publishing qualitative research provided by Korstjens and Moser (2018): credibility, transferability, and confirmability.

5.3.6.1 **Credibility.** In CGT, credibility begins with gaining sufficient data through prolonged engagement with participants to support depth of analysis. Given the controversial topic of analysis, ample data was collected (Charmaz, & Thornberg, 2020) to enable penetrating questions to be asked about codes, and thereby allow perceptive and systematic comparisons throughout the interactive analytic process (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Prolonged engagement with participants ensured sufficient credibility was achieved through a total of seventeen hours of interviews and eight hours of follow-up interviews. Two cycles of recruitment allowed for theoretical sampling to refine categories through rich retelling of experiences on more focused aspects of facing the climate crisis. Persistent engagement with the data was maintained over 11 months through repeated reading of the over 138,000 words transcribed and 3600 codes produced through many iterative cycles of analysis. My own perspectives and analytic choices were also under thorough scrutiny through reflective memo writing throughout to elucidate evolving or implicit assumptions and to maintain the posture of methodological self-consciousness essential to credibility (Bryant & Charmaz, 2019).

5.3.6.2 **Resonance and Transferability.** Resonance of the study findings, with people beyond those interviewed and contexts not directly explored in the data, was highlighted by Charmaz and Thornberg (2020) as indicative of the transferability and scope of the research. Therefore, comprehensive descriptions of the research recruitment, context, and process were provided in the methods chapter. Data collection and analysis prioritised

illumination of participant experiences above all else to enable potential transferability of insight to be inferred by readers. For example, asking follow-up questions about interconnection and community helped raise participants' voices on the issues most important to them, and as a result, their narratives gained resonance. Tolerance of ambiguity throughout the six months of pure coding meant becoming intimately acquainted with the "worlds" of my participants before constructing analytic handles to understand them. Then, during theory construction, seven follow-up interviews helped ensure emerging theory remained grounded in the perspectives and experiences of the participants who were not involved as active co-constructors throughout the year-long process of analysis. As provided in Section 5.2, the current findings resonate with and are sensitive to the eco-psychology literature and serve the community the participants were recruited from in the context of COVID-19.

5.3.6.3 **Transparency, Transferability and Confirmability.** A full justification of methodological decision-making has been outlined in the methods chapter. Conceptual categories and theoretical interpretations were checked by a third-party GT researcher to promote transparency and reflexivity in the research process (Bryant & Charmaz, 2019; Charmaz & Thornberg, 2020). A comprehensive account of the research process has been provided, including: interviews (see Appendix L for an excerpt of an interview transcript), memo-writing (see Appendix M for an example), supervision notes, and analysis process (see Appendix N for a summary of analysis process and Appendix K for a summary of focused codes).

5.3.6.4 **Originality and Usefulness.** I hope this research offers new insights by providing a non-pathologising and nuanced conceptualization of a difficult experience by drawing on in-depth accounts of lived experience. As the first UK study of its kind at the time of writing, it offers a holistic understanding of eco-anxiety by outlining the full trajectory of the experience of facing the climate crisis. I hope these findings can support people, especially counselling psychologists, to build the capacity to engage with deep emotions about the climate crisis with more openness.

5.4 Reflexivity in the Research Process

5.4.1 *Reflections on Process of Analysis*

The process of analysis was more emotional and overwhelming than expected, which made Shullman's (2017) leadership stance of holding insights lightly and sitting with uncertainty about emerging theory far more challenging to maintain. Appreciating the enormity of distress and diversity of perspectives offered felt challenging in the midst of COVID-19. In line with CoP's commitment to leading with self-awareness (Cooper, 2009), I reflected on my own processes, biases, and reactions. I realised my stance in relation to my own complicity to the social injustice issues of the climate crisis and how my position of privilege impacted upon my working relationships with participants and their data. In this way, analysis was both a public and personal process of reflexivity and learning motivated by my sense of responsibility to honour the narratives entrusted to me.

Researching the experience of facing the climate crisis confirmed to me the importance of memo-writing for reflexivity (Charmaz, 2006); it is impossible to establish a neutral and unobtrusive relationship with a research project using data we have collated interpersonally and on a subject related to the planet we co-habit. Therefore, building self-awareness (Morrow, 2007; Wertz et al., 2011) and managing the emotional impact of participants' data was essential to reflect on the central role I played in the dynamic research process. My position of 'knowledgeable outsider' changed as I learned from participants' accounts and developed more of an 'insider' perspective. Therefore, I needed to counterbalance the fluidity of my own views and personal interest by deliberately avoiding asking leading questions and being careful to check my assumptions throughout the interview process. I also attempted to adopt Milligan's (2016) position of 'inbetweener' so the strengths of my 'insiderness' and 'outsiderness' could be held simultaneously when grounded in humility and openness (Cooper, 2009; Timonen et al., 2018). A "dual form" of reflexive memo-writing helped sustain this position (Willig & Stainton-Rogers, 2017). Firstly, I reflected personally on my own impact on the research and on how the research impacted on me (Lazard & McAvoy, 2020). Secondly, I reflected on what I expected would emerge during the research (Robson & McCartan, 2015) and on how my own evolving interpretations partly shaped my analysis (Lazard, & McAvoy, 2020).

During initial interviews, I realised I needed to think carefully about how I managed the interview structure to avoid bringing too much of myself into the conversation or being quasi-therapeutic (Fassinger, 2005) by being overprotective of my participants and imagining them to be more uncomfortable than they actually were. Avoiding negative affect during data collection, which arose due to my own responses to participants' presentations of distress, risked introducing a positive bias in our co-constructed understanding of eco-anxiety. In the context of COVID-19, I was aware that increased social isolation and reduced social support could increase the vulnerability of participants following interviews. In line with Shullman's (2017) learning leadership approach, I sought to create an environment that felt empowering and supportive. My strong belief in empowerment conflicted with my need to gather data from participants that was "unbiased by my own projections of important emotional issues" (Fassinger, 2005, p.159). Therefore, I discussed these issues with my research supervisors and studied interview skills specific to researching distress (Decker et al., 2011; Proctor, 2002; Tribe & Morrissey, 2020). At the start of interviews, I encouraged participants to take a break if, at any point, they felt this would be beneficial. When appropriate, as Fassinger (2005) suggested, I paused recording when it was more important to address the personal challenges that had arisen for participants before returning to the research questions. After ensuring interviews ended on a positive note (Charmaz, 2014), I ensured participants had contact details of support services they could access after the interview. Post-interview memo-writing on my interview skills (Grafanaki, 1996) deepened my self-awareness of my blind spots and emotional responses to participants (Fassinger, 2005). In this way, I maintained focus on being open and present, 'listening and being with' rather than 'doing interviews to participants' (Belyani & Marshall, 2020; Cutts, 2013). Similarly, I approached the analysis of interview transcripts as a continued interaction with participants, which meant 'staying close' to the data and holding my interpretations lightly (Charmaz, 2014). As a result, the ethical underpinnings of the research became "the essence" of what we did (Cooper, 2009, p.4).

5.4.2 *Reflections Overall*

As a Trainee Counselling Psychologist, I initially found it difficult to comprehend how GT "gave voice" to participants without telling their individual stories (Breckenridge et al., 2012). Line-by-line coding felt as if I was fracturing transcripts and risking de-contextualising the data, which is counter-intuitive to my humanistic values. However, as

analysis continued, fragmented abstracted codes were woven together through theoretical co-construction into a whole story (Chun Tie et al., 2019). While many counselling psychologists argue that human narratives cannot be reduced into parts (Cooper, 2009), I felt participants welcomed their words being welded together with others' to create a collective, integrative offering that might speak louder together than apart. GT has been critiqued as a difficult method to implement due to a lack of consistent guidance. I partially agree. I found methodological challenges increased exponentially when I resisted "tolerating the uncertainty" inherent to this approach (Charmaz, 2000, p.168). For example, remaining "semi-blind" to categories and close to the data was essential to be led by concerns that were significant to participants and to be receptive to emerging categories underpinning the psychosocial processes (Fassinger, 2005; Kenny & Fourie, 2015). Therefore, I appreciate why CGT is called 'ambitious' in its attempt to render "convincing portrayals of social processes" (Timonen et al., 2018 p.8) and "subjective experiences" in their fullness (Charmaz, 2000, p.269).

5.5 Implications and Recommendations

5.5.1 *Clinical Implications*

This research provides leadership by elevating the voices of those experiencing eco-anxiety and highlighting the value of their distress in response to the issues of threat, power, and social injustice (Barnwell et al., 2020; Ojala, 2013). This study provides a deeper understanding of eco-anxiety to better support CoPs to avoid unknowingly minimising and pathologising the experience (Cutts, 2013; Palmer & Parish, 2008). This study suggests the experience of eco-anxiety can be understood as:

1. both an alarm and grief response to collective threat, trauma, and loss;
2. an emotional and relational experience more than cognitively driven one;
3. an intra- and inter-relational process that prompts identity reconstruction;
4. requiring emotional tolerance to open up and connect with the climate crisis, other-than-human life, and the self;
5. a transformational process when supported by group experiences (with human or other-than-human life) that honour and help with reconciliation of inner conflicts to enable opening-up to a "true self";

6. a catalyst (in the context of connection with human or other-than-human life) for experiencing a less lonely, richer, and fuller life in the face of the climate crisis.

5.5.1.1 **Therapeutic Support for the Process of Waking Up Is Welcome.** Participants confirmed the expertise of counselling psychologists and therapists is needed to support change agents and activists when thinking about their psychological blocks to responding to this crisis, so eco-anxiety can lead to personal wisdom rather than disavowal or result in burn-out (Huxley & Lambrick, 2020). Similarly, most participants felt the goal of hope commonly inserted into psychological theory on eco-anxiety was unhelpful and undermined the value of the experience of eco-anxiety. Participants suggested psychologists need to be informed about the political context and science of climate change when therapeutically supporting people through the psychosocial processes of facing the climate crisis (Clayton & Karazsia, 2020; Van Susteren & Al-Delaimy, 2020). Whilst being aware of the systemic causes of client suffering is part of our work as psychologists, explicitly inquiring about eco-anxiety can make it feel like a safe topic of discussion rather than something confessed (Milton, 2017). Participants differed on how important it was for counselling psychologists to have had personal experience of eco-anxiety. However, adopting a respectful attitude towards clients' attachments to places or other-than-human relationships, and accepting that clients may feel these are equal to human ones, was also emphasized by participants as important for therapeutic rapport or 'communion' (Higley & Milton, 2008). Counselling psychologist Hazel also stated that attachment to the more-than-human world is often overlooked by psychologists (Higley & Milton, 2008; Milton, 2017). Hazel suggested that psychologists should be curious about and validate clients' relationships with pets, places, and nature; she argued these relationships are as important, if not more important, than human relationships and should therefore be 'welcomed' in therapy discussion. Most participants considered it important for psychologists to integrate systemic thinking into their work so they and their clients could both recognise how we are all "imprisoned in our complicity". Oak emphasised the importance of psychologists educating themselves, so they could become more politically and environmentally 'aware', which would help support clients' exploration of their connectedness to the climate crisis. Most participants suggested that psychological interventions for eco-anxiety should take the form of group interventions; these can provide safe spaces for collective grieving about the climate crisis, while helping meet the need for relatedness (Budziszewska & Jonsson, 2021). Several participants highlighted how helpful it was to participate in therapeutic groups as these helped them

realise that they were not alone in their care for a suffering planet, and that they could be vulnerable with others in a safe space.

5.5.1.2 **Leadership in Counselling Psychology Practice Addressing Context and Injustice.** This research contributes to the development of the professional identity of CoP, which views mental health not as an exclusively individual issue separate from the wider context (Orange, 2016). This is significant as Milton (2016) argues that CoPs are at risk of losing sight of our origins and pluralistic values if we do not consider the context of our clients: both their environmental and social context, and even as widely as their global context of the climate crisis. Eco-anxiety is a politically laden and environmental topic (Pihkala, 2020). Neither of these themes feature prominently in CoP training. This research provides a theoretical understanding of eco-anxiety that could serve to raise awareness of and encourage training on this topic, which will become increasingly relevant to human survival and wellbeing. Living in the context of COVID-19 has taught us how connected we really are. Gone are the days when political and social realities could be ignored in the therapy room (Winter, 2019). The Black Lives Matter movement has also taught us we cannot pretend to not be complicit in systems of abuse and injustice just because they are part of our mainstream social norms (Hoggett, & Randall, 2018). These emotions, although challenging at an individual level, are desirable at a collective level because of their power to mobilise collective action for socio-political transformation (Budziszewska & Jonsson, 2021).

5.5.2 *Implications for Future Research*

Coyle and Van Susteren (2012) argued that further research is needed to understand the experience of facing the climate crisis as climate change increasingly becomes a "top of mind" concern and that psychologists are not prepared for it. Four recommended themes for further research are:

1) equity in the experience of eco-anxiety;
2) supporting community and relatedness in the experience of eco-anxiety;
3) practicing ethical activism in a way that is sustainable; and
4) regenerative group processes for wellbeing.

Firstly, further research is needed to raise the voices of those directly affected by the climate crisis and those in the UK who self-identify as eco-anxious and are part of an

ethnic minority (Hickman, 2020). The voices of those on the front lines of climate change are well-positioned to teach us about the direct experience of the climate crisis as it increasingly affects all of us. Research is needed to explore ways of building equity in the experience of eco-anxiety; for example, by finding ways of overcoming obstacles and issues of privilege, time, and social capital to help everyone personally respond to the macro-issue of the climate crisis. Although all participants agreed the climate crisis was not a "rich person" or "young person" problem, further exploration is required into how age, gender, and socioeconomic status impact the experience of eco-anxiety. Secondly, further research is required to understand how people can build social connection and community to support them in processing eco-anxiety, especially when they do have not yet have a 'green' or 'eco-identity'. Participants felt being in community was important for facilitating experiential learning about the crisis, which is necessary for sustainable personal and collective change (Budziszewska & Jonsson, 2021). Such research could help us to learn from collectivist indigenous or first nation approaches to distress that incorporate ritual and ceremony to facilitate connection between humans and with other-than-human life (Cunsolo et al., 2020). It was unclear which processes of accessing support through community were more effective in reducing participants' loneliness and creating emotional safety for them to experience wonder and openness towards nature. Research into the experience of being with nature and bonding with local places is needed to understand better the experience of facing the loss of nature (Kahn & Hasbach, 2012). Thirdly, further research into how practising ethical activism can be sustainable is needed, so CoPs are equipped to support people in remaining active in the face of real threats (Budziszewska & Jonsson, 2021). Research should expand, from exploring the moderating emotions that support climate action, towards two psychosocial aspects of climate action: firstly, how people understand what action or ethical activism aligns with their expertise and evolving identity; and secondly, how people remain relationally connected to others moving at different 'speeds' and experiencing different journeys (Gibbons, 2020). Fourthly, further research is needed into how regenerative group processes, like WTR, build emotional safety and compassion for self and other, using spiritual, nature-based, and body-oriented practices towards integration of social and ecological identities (Pihkala, 2018; Westell & Bunting, 2020).

5.6 Conclusion

The experience of facing the climate crisis can be traumatic, chaotic, and terrifying. To date, eco-anxiety literature has focused on ways to reduce difficult feelings and promote climate action. The current study contributes to the growing body of work that emphasises the importance of a person's relationship to these experiences, the meanings they hold, and the transformational growth they can facilitate through regeneratively sustained eco-anxiety (Gibbons, 2020). Further research is needed that highlights the value of 'being with' rather than 'getting away' from distress about the climate crisis. Embodying and sustaining deep care for injustice on our suffering planet is no small feat. By raising the voices of those living consciously and responsively to the climate crisis, we may learn to better support each other to 'be with' the "ultimate psychological dilemma" (Brick & van der Linden, 2018, p.5). Amidst the current UK culture of 'uncare' and lonely disconnection (Weintrobe, 2021), the participants of this study remind us of a vital truth. Being motivated by love can move us towards a richer and fuller existence in communion with all of life on Earth.

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Appendices

Appendix A. Literature Review Summary Tables

Table A1

Literature Review Theme 1: Diagnosis and Pathology.

Author(s), Year, Country	Aim	Design, Data Collection	Sample	Key Relevant Findings
Searle & Gow, 2010, Australia	To examine associations between climate change distress, environmental beliefs, future anxiety, intolerance of uncertainty, age, and gender.	Survey design. Cross-sectional and correlational analyses.	Total n= 275 n= 173 university students n= 102 adult members of general public	Concluded the Australian public are becoming increasingly concerned about climate change. • Anxiety levels beyond age and gender differences and determined by values (pro-environmental), beliefs, tolerance of uncertainty and future anxiety. • The relationship between concern and mental health symptoms of distress were indicative of depression, anxiety and stress.
BACP & YouGov 2020, UK	To explore responses to climate change.	Survey design. Descriptive statistics weighted to be representative of all GB adults (aged 16+).	n= 5,527 adults	• 55% of people feel that climate change has impacted on their wellbeing to some degree. • Of those who reported being affected by climate change, 65% were concerned about the impact on the natural world, 63% were concerned about increased frequency of natural disasters; 58% were worried about what the world would be like for future generations; 30% were worried about how their life would be affected.
Cianconi, 2020, Italy	To systematically review the mental health impacts of climate change.	Systematic review of research and articles on classical psychiatric disorders, and phenomena related to climate change and extreme weather.	163 articles reviewed	• Climate change is having a serious impact on the mental health of those not directly impacted. • The lack of literature is perhaps due to the complexity and novelty of this issue.

Table A2

Literature Review Theme 2: Multifaceted Experience

Author(s), Year, Country	Aim	Design, Data Collection	Sample	Key Relevant Findings
Hogg et al., 2021, Australia	To develop and validate the 'Hogg Eco-Anxiety Scale', a Multidimensional Scale for eco-anxiety (HEAS-13).	Multi-study mixed methods design of surveys with closed and open questions: • Study 1 - testing 7 item scale. • Study 2 - testing 13 item scale. • Study 3 - examining stability of factors over time. Exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis of survey data: Generalised Anxiety Disorder Scale, Depression Anxiety Stress Scale, climate change Belief and Credibility of Science.	Survey study 1: n= 334 2: n= 365 3: n=189 Students University of Canberra, Australia & Victoria University, New Zealand	Eco-anxiety is a multifaceted psychological experience distinct from other mental health experience: • affective symptoms • rumination about environmental events • behavioural symptoms: difficulty working, sleeping or studying • and anxiety about one's negative impact on the planet.
Verplanken et al., 2020, UK	To explore the nature of eco-anxiety regarding its relationship to five dimensions: 1. mental health, 2. psychological distance, 3. nature-relatedness, 4. emotions **5.** identity.	Repeated study design: Study 1: Online surveys on: Penn State Worry, Global warming, Personal issues, World economy, Habit Index of Negative Thinking questionnaire. Study 2: replication of study 1 during COVID-19 context. Study 3: repeat study 1 with 16 questions measuring: psychological distance; pro-environmental values, beliefs and behaviours; green identity; and emotions.	Survey study 1: n= 266 2: n= 266 3: n= 306 Participants recruited from social science research platforms in USA and Europe, the researchers' social media presence, and University of Bath.	• Global warming worry was unrelated to pathological worry and was associated with private PEB and a 'green' self-identity (such as caring about the environment) • The level of global warming worry is insensitive to the COVID-19 context.

Table A3

Literature Review Theme 3: Spectrum of Emotional Experiencing

Author(s), Year, Country	Aim	Design, Data Collection	Sample	Key Relevant Findings
Stanley et al., 2021, Australia	To explore the differential impacts of climate emotions on behaviour and wellbeing: 1. eco-anxiety, 2. eco-depression, **3.** eco-anger.	Online survey design Survey data analysed using structural equation modelling to identify the associations between eco-emotion, wellbeing and pro-climate behaviour, while controlling for other 'negative' eco-emotions. • Participants rated the frequency and intensity of feelings elicited by climate change. • Depression Anxiety and Stress Scale • Public and Private Pro-Environmental Behaviour questionnaire	Sample size was not reported but was reported to have sufficient power. Participants were recruited by Qualtrics. Sample was nationally representative of age, gender, and location using quotas based on census data.	• A spectrum of emotional responses to climate change. • Eco-anger predicted better mental health outcomes and greater engagement in PEB. • Eco-anxiety and eco-depression were described as less adaptive, relating to lower wellbeing. • Eco-depression was more highly associated with collective climate action, than eco-anxiety.
Ballman, 2020, USA	To examine the possibility that eco-anxiety can be reduced by engaging in Pro-environmental behaviour (PEB)	Thesis mixed-method survey design. Hierarchical multiple regression analysis of questionnaires on: Helm et al. (2018) Perceived Environmental Stress Scale, Stern (2000) categories of environmentalism: environmental consumption, citizenship, and activism, Nature Relatedness Scale and Generalized Trust.	Survey study: n= 518 first- and second-year psychology students, University of Regina, USA	• Found bidirectional relationship between eco-anxiety and PEB. • Negative correlation between eco-anxiety and private PEB. • Positive correlation with eco-anxiety and public PEB. • Greatest predictor of eco-anxiety was relationship and connection to nature. • The most concerned engage in public PEB.

Table A4

Literature Review Theme 4: A Values-based Understanding

Author, Year, Country	Aim	Design, Data Collection	Sample	Key Relevant Findings
Kelly, 2017, USA	To explore how planetary health impacts mental health and psychological welling.	Thesis mixed-method design of surveys and interviews on experience of eco-anxiety. Content analysis of survey and interviews.	Survey study: n=114 20-25 years old students Interview study: n=7 students, n=7 experts in environmental psychology, University of Colorado, USA	• Eco-anxiety is complex and related to values. • Participants (n=52) who rated their connection to nature as 'very important' in terms of its support for their mental health reported high eco-anxiety. • Several emotions were associated with different aspects of eco-anxiety (e.g. sadness and grief related to human suffering because of climate change; anxiety-related to thinking about future instability).
Helm et al., 2018, USA	To quantitatively differentiate between three variables: 1.environmental concern, 2. ecological stress, 3. wellbeing	Online survey design (Amazon Mechanical Turk with financial incentive) Correlational analysis of survey data regarding three types of environmental concern described as: 1. "egoistic: concern for oneself; or life", 2. "social-altruistic: concern for others, future generations or country concern", 3. "biospheric: concern for nature" (Helm, 2018, p.158).	Survey study: n= 342 adult parents (of children aged 3 to 10 years-old)	• Holding egoistic and altruistic environmental concerns shielded participants from negative mental health impacts associated with ecological stress (such as depression). • Biospheric concern predicted ecological stress.

Table A5

Literature Review Theme 5: Being with Eco-anxiety in Therapy

Author(s), Year, Country	Aim	Design, Data Collection	Sample	Key Relevant Findings
Budziszewska & Jonsson, 2021, Sweden	Explore the subjective experiences of psychotherapy clients addressing their concerns about climate change in therapy	Semi-structured interviews exploring participants' concerns about climate change, and history of therapeutic experience related to this topic. Initial analysis: Phenomenological Secondary analysis: Thematic analysis aligned with existing conceptual framework of existential themes Strengths of study: Rigorous strength of analysis through several researchers comparing their analysis and thought processes at all stages of the research, through use of supervision and self-reflexivity	n=10 5 women, 5 men, age 18-49	Findings: • Awakening moments were triggered by learning about the climate crisis and realising the global failure to respond appropriately. • Participants described feeling mortal dread, intense fear, mortality salience, grief, hopeless, isolation, existential anxiety, longing for relatedness with others and more-than-human life. Conclusions: • Therapists should not pathologise or minimise the experience of climate anxiety • Psychotherapy must be embedded in social context. Clinical Recommendations: • Focus on relational approaches to reducing loneliness and building community. • Support clients in being proactive in facing the realistic threats climate change poses to humanity, e.g. through engaging in ethical activism and through relationships that address their isolation • Note: Recommendations did not explicitly address clients' reported longing for relatedness with nature

Author(s), Year, Country	Aim	Design, Data Collection	Sample	Key Relevant Findings
Seaman, 2016, USA	To confirm whether climate change was coming up in therapy. To explore therapists external and internal responses to this.	Thesis mixed-method survey study design: online survey (Qualtrics) & interviews. Part 1: how, where, when adult clients discussed climate change in therapy. Part 2: how discussions occurred, how clinicians responded, treatment modalities most successful in addressing climate-change-related distress. Statistical analysis of survey responses. Thematic and content analysis of interview responses.	Survey study n=160 mental health professionals Interview study n=35 therapists	• Five themes of internal responses to climate change in therapy: doom/future anxiety; powerlessness; politics; the inconvenience of lifestyle changes; and concern for vulnerable people. • Eco-anxiety expressed in therapy were associated with several emotions: (32.1%), anger (14.6%), ambivalence (6.6%). • 22.6% of mental health professionals reported being ‘unsure’ what emotions their clients had exhibited in therapy and 50% of professionals reported feeling prepared to work with eco-anxiety. • 17% did not consider their client’s responses to climate change as healthy and appropriate, 26% gave mixed responses.

Table A6

Literature Review Theme 6: Therapeutic Groups for Eco-anxiety

Author(s), Year, Country	Aim	Design, Data Collection	Sample	Key Relevant Findings
Hathaway, 2016, Canada	To illustrate the benefits, challenges, and limitations of the transformative learning process employed in The Work That Reconnects groups.	A case study	13 participants	Connection with each other, the world and emotions was the key theme to the transformational learning process. The group exercises activated emotions, imagination and body to build community, to provide a sense of possibility and empowerment, and were able to transform perspectives and worldviews in order to fully experience emotions. Rather than learning about climate change, the group focused on honouring and working through painful feelings towards a deeper shift in consciousness and connection.
Johnstone, 2019, UK	To survey the experience of 'The Work That Reconnects' groups.	Informal feedback study	Not reported	90% of participants reported that the group had helped strengthen both their sense of connection and feeling that they could make a difference in the world. A participant shared that having distress validated as an appropriate emotional response to world problems was helpful, e.g. "permission to feel, to grieve, to hate, to rage, to cry – validation that I am not alone" (p.9).

Author(s), Year, Country	Aim	Design, Data Collection	Sample	Key Relevant Findings
Büchs et al, 2015, UK	To explore how effective Carbon Conversation Groups were in encouraging participants to reflect and share emotions and inner conflicts in relation to climate change and personal carbon reduction. Carbon Conversations groups include six to eight participants moderated by two facilitators who meet six times.	Multi study, mixed methods design. Semi-structured interview to understand facilitators' experiences. Online survey to past participants of groups on motivations for taking part, personal values, environmental attitudes, behaviour changes following group participation. Included the department of environment, food, rural affairs environmental attitudes and behaviours questionnaire. Interviews explored views on climate change, carbon conversations, everyday practices and the changes they have made after participating in the group. "Bottom-up coding" of survey responses and interviews.	Interview study n= 31 group organisers and facilitators Survey study n=113 participants of groups Interview study n= 26 recruited from survey responders sample to cover a spread of attitudes, geographical location	Painful feelings and shock were reported by participants when they learned about climate change. • Group processes of sharing and being with like-minded people helped to feel empowered, less powerless, agency, to grieve, and to live by their values even after the group ended. • Greater emotional engagement correlated with greater practice change following course. • Information that induced feelings was ineffective in prompting reflection if not given room to express and discuss their responses. • Behaviour change advice without inner attention to inner conflicts linked to identities and values was found to be less effective in long term.

Appendix B. Participation Advert

Pioneering Futures Since 1898

Are you aged 18+ and living in the UK?
Have you experienced eco-anxiety for the last 2 years?*

Have you attended the ecopsychology support group 'The Work That Reconnects' in the 18 months?**

If so, would you like to share your experience with me to increase understanding in this area?

The purpose of my research is to explore the experience of eco-anxiety.

I'm looking for participants who have attended the ecopsychology support group, 'The Work That Reconnects' for facing the climate crisis and feel able to talk about their experiences of eco-anxiety. For the purpose of this study, eco-anxiety is defined as a 'catch-all term' for our various emotional responses associated with learning about causes and effects of climate change (Pihkala, 2019).

If you are interested in taking part, please contact me on and I will send you more information about the study. Your participation will involve an informal online meeting (using Microsoft Teams), which will last between 40-90 minutes. We will have a preliminary phone call to discuss any queries you might have and ensure that you meet the inclusion criteria.

My name is Naomi Aston Director of Studies: Prof. Rachel Tribe (r.tribe@uel.ac.uk) Supervisor: Ms Sonya Divena (s.dineva@uel.ac.uk). I'm a final year doctoral student in Counselling Psychology at the University of East London and I'm currently recruiting participants for my research. This project has been ethically approved by University of East London's Research Ethics Committee and is conducted in accordance with the British Psychological Society's Code of Ethics and Conduct (2009). If you have any questions or comments about my research, do please email me - in which case, I will store your email securely, in accordance with the Data Protection Act (2018).

Thank you

* This study seeks to explore our psychological responses to crisis and rejects the idea that eco-anxiety is a pathology or mental illness. We would like to sensitively acknowledge the difficulty in using a term that is associated with anxiety and appreciate that our experience of facing the climate change includes a spectrum of different emotions and experiences. I would be happy to speak with anyone who might have any reservations about participating or questions surrounding the use of the term ‘eco-anxiety’ in the current study.

** ‘The Work That Reconnects’ group is an ecopsychology support group that facilitates being with and learning from our distress when facing the climate crisis (Rust, 2020).

References

Pihkala, P. (2019). *Climate anxiety: Mental health can be strengthened.* MIELI Mental Health Finland. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/336937227_Climate_Anxiety

Rust, M. J. (2020) *Towards an ecopsychotherapy.* Confer Books

Appendix C. Participation Invitation Letter

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PARTICIPANT INVITATION LETTER

Thank you for considering taking part in this research project to explore the experience of eco-anxiety.

Before making the decision to participate in this study, this information sheet offers a overview of the research project to clarify its topic of investigation, its purpose and what your participation could involve. The researcher will explain this information sheet with you and would be happy to answer any queries you might have. As you read through the following information, please take your time to consider carefully if you wish to participate in this study. If anything is unclear or I can provide further information on any aspect of the research, please let me know. Thank you for your time.

Who is organising the study?

I am Naomi Aston a postgraduate student in the School of Psychology at the University of East London and am studying for a Counselling Psychology Doctorate. As part of my studies I am conducting the research you are being invited to participate in.

What is the purpose of the research?

Title of study: The Experience of Eco-Anxiety Of Individuals Who Have Been Through An Ecopsychology Support Group For Facing The Climate Crisis: A Grounded Theory Inquiry

Research Question: What is the experience of eco-anxiety for individuals who have been through an ecopsychology support group for facing the climate crisis?

In this study I want to understand how individuals who have been through an ecopsychology support group for facing the climate crisis, experience eco-anxiety.

My research has been approved by the School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee. This means that the Committee's evaluation of this ethics application has been guided by the standards of research ethics set by the British Psychological Society.

Why have you been asked to participate?

I'm looking for participants who have attended the ecopsychology support group, 'The Work That Reconnects', for facing the climate crisis who would be willing to talk about about their experiences of eco-anxiety. Here, eco-anxiety is defined as a 'catch-all term' for the various emotional responses associated with learning about causes and effects of climate change (Pihkala, 2018).

Do I have to take part?

You are free to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

I emphasise that I am not looking for 'experts' on the topic I am studying. You will not be judged or personally analysed in any way and you will be treated with respect.

Am I suitable to take part in the study?

People can only take part in the study if they meet specific criteria:

- You have attended an ecopsychology support group for facing the climate crisis, within the last year.
- You have experienced eco-anxiety for at least two years.
- You feel able to talk about your experiences of eco-anxiety in rich detail
- You can speak English well enough to not need the support of an interpreter
- You are 18 years or older
- You are resident in the UK

There are certain criteria that would make this research study unsuitable for you. Unfortunately, we are unable to include anyone at risk to themselves or to other people. In such cases, you will receive information about appropriate services you can contact.

What will I have to do if I take part?

Consent form

If you agree to participate you will be asked to electronically sign a consent form indicating that your participation is voluntary and that you understand your rights.

Taking part in an interview

You will then be interviewed (an informal chat) about your experiences of eco-anxiety. The interview will be conducted via video link using Microsoft Teams which is a free software and I will provide you with a link to download the software. The interview will be video recorded using Microsoft Teams and last between 40 to 90 minutes. If the interview is longer than an hour, we can have a short break before continuing. At the end of the interview you will be able to debrief your experience of taking part in the research with the researcher. This will take approximately 10-15 minutes

I will not be able to pay you for participating in my research, but your participation would be very valuable in helping to develop knowledge and understanding of my research topic

Will the interview findings be anonymous?

Yes. Your privacy and safety will be respected at all times. The informal online meeting on Microsoft Teams will be video recorded using a Microsoft Teams recording function. During the study any electronic data collected will be stored on UEL's OneDrive for Business on the researcher's personal laptop computer which is password protected securely stored within the researcher's private home. Data will be backed up on UEL's OneDrive for Business. All files will be password protected. All passwords will exceed 20 characters in length (over 100 bits), include a combination of uppercase, lowercase and symbol characters, and will be unique to each file or storage device (they will not be re-used for any other purpose). Any paper documents with identifiable information or contact details will be securely stored in a locked

cabinet which only I have access to. All information which is collected about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential, and any electronic information about you will have your name and any identifying information removed so that you cannot be recognised and all data will be anonymised using pseudonyms. Short quotes from the interview may be used in the findings of the study to illuminate the findings. Please be assured it will not be possible to attribute these quotes to you in any way. The anonymised data will be seen by my supervisor and examiners and may be published in academic journals. The only exception to this would be if the interview raised ethical concerns regarding the safety of yourself or someone else.

Do I have to answer all the questions if I don't want to?
There is no obligation to answer any questions, the choice is up to you whether you would like to respond to the queries I have. I would be very interested to hear what you would be comfortable with sharing as opposed to me asking questions. You can stop your participation or withdraw what you have shared with me at any point during the interview.

Will my data and what I say remain confidential?

Your privacy and safety will be respected at all times:

- You will not be identified by data collected, on any written material resulting from the data collected, or in any write-up of the research.
- If at any point I am worried about your safety or others I will need to tell my researcher supervisor Professor Rachel Tribe. Whenever possible I will let you know first that this is happening.

What if I experience the interview as uncomfortable or distressing?
During the interview, if you find yourself feeling uncomfortable or distressed by the topics we discuss please don't hesitate to let me know. There is a possibility that speaking about your experience of eco-anxiety may bring up a range of feelings for you. If this happens you can contact the researcher and counselling services like MIND (www.mind.org.uk, Tel. 0300 123 3393), the Samaritans (www.samaritans.org, free 24-hour helpline on 116 123), or SANE (www.sane.org.uk/support, SANEline 0300 304 7000 daily, 4.30pm to 10.30pm). A list of confidential support services will be given to you at the end.

What will happen to the information that you provide?

- Any information you give which might identify you (e.g. names, places etc.) will be changed using pseudonyms.

- The transcript of your interview and any recording will be encrypted and password protected.

- The interviews will be video recorded using Microsoft Teams and downloaded and removed from Microsoft Teams after the interview has been completed. Video-files will be password protected on the researcher's on UEL's OneDrive for Business and backed up at least weekly. All files will be password protected. All passwords will exceed 20 characters in length (over 100 bits), include a combination of uppercase, lowercase and symbol characters, and will be unique to each file or storage device (they will not be re-used for any other purpose).

- Only I will view video recordings. If my research supervisor or an examiner requests to view them, recordings will be converted from video to audio and only shared in an anonymous form.

- Once transcription of each video is completed, the video file will be converted into an audio file and the video file will be deleted.

- After my thesis has been examined, the audio file of your interview will be deleted.

- The written transcript of your interview will be kept and destroyed after five years. The anonymised transcripts may be used to write up research in the future for publication. Your anonymity will be maintained.

- The findings of this research will contribute to the completion of my doctoral thesis. This may be submitted to be considered for publication. If you would like, a copy of the findings can be made available to you by email.

What if you want to withdraw?

You are free to withdraw from the research study at any time without explanation, disadvantage or consequence. Separately, you may also request to withdraw your data even after you have participated, provided that this request is made three weeks after the data being collected (after which point the data analysis will begin, and withdrawal will not be possible).

Contact Details

If you would like further information about my research or have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me, Ms Naomi Aston, email:

If you have any questions or concerns about how the research has been conducted please contact the research supervisor: Professor Rachel Tribe, (email: r.tribe@uel.ac.uk), my second supervisor: Ms Sonya Divena (s.dineva@uel.ac.uk), School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ

or

Chair of the School of Psychology Research Ethics Sub-committee: Dr Tim Lomas, School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ (email: t.lomas@uel.ac.uk).

Version 3. 10 June 2020

Appendix D. Screening Consent Form

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Title of study: The experience of eco-anxiety of individuals who have been through an ecopsychology support group for facing the climate crisis.

Name of researcher: Naomi Aston

Screening consent will be conducted over the telephone. As such the researcher taking consent must initial all boxes and indicate that the participant has agreed to the following:

1. Potential participant confirms they have read and understood the information sheet dated 10 June 2020 (version 3) for the above study. They have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily. ☐

2. Potential participant understands what is being proposed and the procedures in which they will be involved have been explained. Potential participants understand that their participation is voluntary and that they are free to withdraw at any time without disadvantage to themselves and without being obliged to give any reason. The potential participant also understands that should they withdraw; the researcher reserves the right to use their anonymous data after analysis of the data has begun (three weeks after meeting). ☐

3. Potential participant understands that their involvement in this study, and particular data from this research, will remain strictly confidential and only the researcher(s) involved in the study will have access to identifying data. Potential participant understands that information relating to them taking part in this study will be stored on an electronic database within the University of East London for 5 years. ☐

4. Potential participant agrees to take part in the screening process. ☐

_____
Name of Potential Participant

_____ _____
Researcher's signature Date

Appendix E. Inclusion Criteria

Inclusion/ Exclusion Criterion	Explanation and Justification	Responses Y/N
Experience of an ecopsychology support group focused on facing the climate crisis in the 18 months	Homogeneity: I want their experience to be within the last year, so that they can easily draw on their memory of this experience during the interview.	
Self-report experiencing and living with eco-anxiety for at least two years	I want to gain personal accounts of individuals who have had the opportunity to process their anxiety beyond an initial state of turmoil, which is important because I do not aim to examine fresh emotions that have not yet crystallised into long-standing eco-anxiety (Pihkala, 2018).	
Self-report feeling able to talk about their experiences of eco-anxiety in rich detail	I need rich detailed accounts to work with (Charmaz, 2016).	
Currently living in the UK	Pragmatic and research focus reasons: I cannot go abroad due to time and financial limitations. The study seeks to address the gap of eco-anxiety research in the UK.	
Not currently engaged in therapy with the NHS;	I want to recruit participants who have had opportunity to reflect on their experience rather than in the initial experience of reflecting and processing their eco-anxiety.	
`Resilient	I would like to recruit participants who can reflect on their experience of eco-anxiety in a lucid way without the risk of triggering emotions that would be very difficult for the participant to contain.	
Participant has sufficient level of English and not need for an interpreter.	Pragmatic reasons: as the researcher did not have the facilities to access an interpreter only English-speaking participants were recruited.	
Participant has access to a computer with internet and has the ability to use it.	Pragmatic reasons: all interviews will take place online using Microsoft Teams.	
Participants have not facilitated WTR groups themselves or have not attended the group more than twice.	Homogeneity: I want narrow participant group to allow greater depth than breadth of exploration into the experience of eco-anxiety of the general public who have attended a 'The Work That Reconnects' group.	
Participants do not know the researcher personally.	To avoid demand characteristics or the participant sharing experiences in a way to please me based on previous interactions with them I will only recruit individuals that I have not previously met.	

Appendix F. Online Consent to Interview Form

Pioneering Futures Since 1898

Consent to participate in a research study

Title of study: the experience of eco-anxiety of individuals who have been through an ecopsychology support group for facing the climate crisis.

Name of researcher: Ms. Naomi Aston

This document represents a confidentiality agreement between Ms Naomi Aston (doctoral student in Counselling Psychology) and the person signing below. The document contains terms and conditions of confidentiality as laid down by the University of East London.

I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated 10 June 2020 (version 3) for this study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, discuss the details, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.

I understand that my involvement in this study will include an informal online meeting with the researcher using Microsoft Teams video technology and will be recorded using Microsoft teams video recording function. I understand that data from this research will remain confidential. It has been explained to me what will happen once the research study has been completed.

By typing my name below I freely and fully consent to participate in the study which has been fully explained to me. Having given this consent, I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without disadvantage to myself and without being obliged to give any reason. I also understand that should I withdraw; the researcher reserves the right to use my anonymous data after analysis of the data has begun.

Name:

Appendix G. Questions Used in Interviews

Stage	Aims	Script, Questions and Prompts
Introduction Thanks, Aim, Researcher and participant roles, Questions?	Thanks for your willingness to participate. Participant Information Form (Questions?) Participant Consent Form 1 hour. How much time available?	"Thank you so much for agreeing to take part in this meeting."
	Reiterate the aim of the interview/ meeting: A pre-prepared question; listen and empathise	“My job is to listen, empathise and do my best to understand your experience of eco-anxiety, and what it means to you and how it feels when facing the climate crisis. I am really interested to hear your journey and understanding in as much detail as possible please. Do you have any questions before we begin?"
Eco-anxiety Orient. pt to structure and focus of interview /meeting	Introduce interview structure, clarify the researcher and interviewee’s roles confirming the focus to listen and understand.	“Thank you so much for agreeing to take part in this study. I really appreciate your time. Last time we met, I asked you to think about your experiences of eco-anxiety and of attending a ‘The Work That Reconnects’ group. I'm going to ask you two main questions about how you experience eco-anxiety and living with eco-anxiety after attending the support group. I may ask more in response to your questions, but my main priority is to listen to what you have to say. Please take as much time as you like. I expect the meeting will take about an hour but if we need more time than that, we can take a break and then carry on."
	Invite questions from the participant.	“Do you have any queries before we start?
	Obtain data to answer research question (RQ). Prompts about psychological process of eco-anxiety:	"Please would you talk me through your personal experience of eco-anxiety?" *Prompts, if necessary, RE:* *What does the term ‘eco-anxiety’ mean to you?* *How do you know you are experiencing eco-anxiety?* *How does it begin?* *How would you notice it in someone else?*

Stage	Aims	Script, Questions and Prompts
		How do you cope with it? *How would you describe an eco-anxious person?* *What would you like people to know about experiencing eco-anxiety?* *What was your experience of the group?* *What has influenced your experience of it?* *How much time have you been able to spend reflecting on this?*
	Ask participant about their experience of the interview and thank them for their contribution to the research.	"Is there anything that would be important for me to know about your experience of eco-anxiety?"
Debrief	Ensure the participant has the opportunity to ask questions. Their experience of sharing about eco-anxiety? Questions about the research? Open to further contact about the research, involvement in analysis. Debrief: • Withdraw (21 days) • Further interviews/ contact? • Let them know I will email them the debrief letter Thanks	"Do you have any other questions, you haven't had an opportunity to ask yet?" "Thank you so much contributing your time and wisdom to this research, I hope that with your input we will help inform therapy practice on how individuals experience eco-anxiety when facing the climate crisis." Ask the participant about their experience of meeting online to discuss their experience of eco-anxiety. Perhaps ask if there is anything that might have made the process easier or more supported? Perhaps ask how they are feeling now that the question part of the meeting has finished and offer them information on the services that they might enjoy/find supportive to be connected with. Remind participant about their freedom to withdraw: "although you have already completed the interview your involvement is still voluntary, and you may choose to withdraw the data you provided prior to debriefing, without penalty or loss of compensation offered to you. Withdrawing your submission will not adversely affect your relationship with University of East London, the researchers, or any of our affiliates. You can withdraw your participation within 3 weeks after meeting, after which the data will begin to be analysed." "Would you like to have a copy of the transcript or the analysis at later stages of this research project?" "Thank you again for your participation." "During analysis, if I find I have queries about my understanding of your interview transcript, would it be OK to send you a short email?"

Appendix H. Participant Debrief Letter

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PARTICIPANT DEBRIEF LETTER

Thank you for participating in my research study on the experience of eco-anxiety of individuals who have been through an ecopsychology support group for facing the climate crisis. This letter offers information that may be relevant in light of you having now taken part.

What was this study hoping to achieve?

The aim of this study was to explore how people experience eco-anxiety when facing the climate crisis. This study was in response to the call for further research to understand how we can support people as they become aware of the current global problem of climate change (Mitchell, 2019). In this way the study seeks to inform Counselling Psychologists on how individuals experience eco-anxiety when facing the climate crisis. It is hoped that findings from this research may provide further guidance for policy makers to influence evidence-based policy and the practice of Counselling Psychologists in raising awareness of the psychological responses to this crisis.

What will happen to the information that you have provided?

The following steps will be taken to ensure the confidentiality and integrity of the data you have provided.

- Any information you give which might identify you (e.g. names, places etc.) will be changed using pseudonyms.

- The transcript of your interview and any recording will be encrypted and password protected.

- The interviews have been video recorded using Microsoft Teams and downloaded and removed from Microsoft Teams after the interview was completed. Video-files will be password protected, stored on UEL's OneDrive for Business and backed up at least once a week. All files will be password protected. All passwords will exceed 20 characters in length (over 100 bits), include a combination of uppercase, lowercase and symbol characters, and will be unique to each file or storage device (they will not be re-used for any other purpose).

- Only I will view video recordings. If my research supervisor or an examiner requests to view them, recordings will be converted from video to audio and only shared in an anonymous form.

- Once transcription of each video is completed, the video file will be converted into an audio file and the video file will be deleted.

- After my thesis has been examined, the audio file of your interview will be deleted.

• The written transcript of your interview will be kept and destroyed after five years. The anonymised transcripts may be used to write up research in the future for publication. Your anonymity will be maintained.

• What you have shared today will contribute to the completion of my doctoral research project. The research may be considered for publication. If you would like a summary of the findings emailed to you please let the researcher know.

What if you have been adversely affected by taking part?

It is not anticipated that you will have been adversely affected by taking part in the research, and all reasonable steps have been taken to minimise potential harm. Nevertheless, it is still possible that your participation – or its after-effects – may have been challenging, distressing or uncomfortable in some way.

If you have been affected in any of those ways you may find the following resources/services helpful in relation to obtaining information and support:

FACING DIFFICULT TRUTHS
Climate Psychology Alliance

CPAtherapeutics@yahoo.com

https://www.climatepsychologyalliance.org/support/indsupport

This website provides online forum support, group support, self-help literature, group and individual therapy for facing the climate crisis.

Individual therapeutic support:

Climate Psychology Alliance are offering support to people who are affected by the ecological, biodiversity and climate crises.

Climate Psychology Alliance members listed on the website are all aware of the emotional and psychological effect of the climate crisis and offer up to 3 free sessions of therapeutic support face to face or by phone or skype. The credentials and accreditations of each therapist are available on the website noted above.

The Therapeutic Support will focus on:

- Supporting people to face the uncertainty of the climate crisis.
- Validating emotional responses to the climate crisis - such as helplessness, grief, anger, despair, anxiety and fear.
- Helping individuals, families and groups develop emotional resilience.
- Contributing to sustainable communities and preparing for change.
- Helping to understand our complex individual and cultural responses.

This is on offer to groups or individuals.

As CPA is not an emergency service if you have concerns about your own or others' mental health please contact your GP.

Other sources of support in an emergency:

mind
for better mental health

0300 123 3393
www.mind.org.uk
Mind provides advice and support on all aspects of mental health and offers local counselling services in many areas.

SAMARITANS	0845 790 9090 www.samaritans.org Samaritans provides a 24hr confidential telephone service offering emotional support.
SANE	0300 304 7000 www.sane.org.uk/support Saneline provides a national out-of-hours mental health helpline offering specialist emotional support, guidance and information to anyone affected by mental illness, including family, friends and carers open every day of the year from 4.30pm to 10.30pm

Other helpful information about climate change provided by the Division of Counselling Psychology British Psychology Society reference library on climate change:

Climate Crisis Conversations https://climatepsychology.podbean.com/

American Psychological Association https://www.apa.org/research/action/speaking-ofpsychology/climate-change

You are also very welcome to contact me or my supervisor via email if you have specific questions or concerns.

Contact Details

If you would like further information about my research or have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Email: u1433372@uel.ac.uk

If you have any questions or concerns about how the research has been conducted please contact the research supervisor, Professor Rachel Tribe, School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ,

Email: r.tribe@uel.ac.uk

or

Chair of the School of Psychology Research Ethics Sub-committee: Dr Tim Lomas, School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ.

(Email: t.lomas@uel.ac.uk)

If you have any questions or would like any further information about this research, please contact the researcher at the following address u1433372@uel.ac.uk by telephone on 078513 48425.

Naomi Aston
Trainee Counselling Psychologist
Doctorate Course in Counselling Psychology University of East London

Appendix I. Inclusion Criteria for Theoretical Sampling

Inclusion Criteria	Explanation and Justification Based on First Cycle of Data Collection	Responses Y/N
Has experience eco-anxiety for more than 2 years.		
Participant feels able to speak about AT LEAST ONE of the following topics		
The role of **grief** in the experience of eco-anxiety	Grief has been mentioned by all seven participants interviewed so far but has been described in diverse ways.	
The role of close **relationships with like-minded** people in the experience of eco-anxiety	The role of close relationships with people (face to face or via social media) has been described as essential to maintaining emotional proximity to the climate crisis (so that it remains personally affective).	
The role of **'making space'** for eco-anxiety	Several participants have talked about 'climate crisis aligned' commitments that help sustain their conscious awareness of the climate crisis, but which are at the expense of other 'life priorities'. This has been described in seemingly contradictory ways (e.g. as painfully sacrificial, as liberating and as unavoidable).	
The role of **emotional intelligence** in sustaining the experience of eco-anxiety	Several participants have attributed their eco-anxiety to their emotional intelligence. I would like to explore this further to elucidate what participants mean by emotional maturity/intelligence.	
The role of **collective experience** of eco-anxiety	All the participants have shared that collective experiences of honouring their emotions about the climate crisis have been fundamental to sustaining their awareness of and care for the planet. However, few have shared what they mean by 'the collective experience'. This would be particularly helpful to explore given that some of the 'shared experiences' are being facilitated virtually rather than face-to-face (during COVID-19 pandemic).	
The role of **thought leaders versus close relationships**	Many participants describe admiration for experts and thought leaders within the climate movement. It is unclear how para-social relationships with thought leaders differ in function with more personal relationships. It would be helpful to distinguish the differences between the relationships that make the experience of eco-anxiety possible.	

Appendix J. Ethical Approval Application

School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee

NOTICE OF ETHICS REVIEW DECISION

For research involving human participants
BSc/MSc/MA/Professional Doctorates in Clinical, Counselling and Educational Psychology

REVIEWER: Helena Bunn

SUPERVISOR: Rachel Tribe

STUDENT: Naomi Aston

Course: Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology

Title of proposed study: The experience of eco-anxiety of individuals who have been through an ecopsychology support group for facing the climate crisis: A grounded theory inquiry

DECISION OPTIONS:

1. **APPROVED**: Ethics approval for the above named research study has been granted from the date of approval (see end of this notice) to the date it is submitted for assessment/examination.

2. **APPROVED, BUT MINOR AMENDMENTS ARE REQUIRED BEFORE THE RESEARCH COMMENCES** (see Minor Amendments box below): In this circumstance, re-submission of an ethics application is not required but the student must confirm with their supervisor that all minor amendments have been made before the research commences. Students are to do this by filling in the confirmation box below when all amendments have been attended to and emailing a copy of this decision notice to her/his supervisor for their records. The supervisor will then forward the student's confirmation to the School for its records.

3. **NOT APPROVED, MAJOR AMENDMENTS AND RE-SUBMISSION REQUIRED** (see Major Amendments box below): In this circumstance, a revised ethics application must be submitted and approved before any research takes place. The revised application will be reviewed by the same reviewer. If in doubt, students should ask their supervisor for support in revising their ethics application.

DECISION ON THE ABOVE-NAMED PROPOSED RESEARCH STUDY
(Please indicate the decision according to one of the 3 options above)

Approved with minor amendments

Minor amendments required *(for reviewer)*:

4.4 Data storage: **please explain** why is necessary to use the video recording for data transcription; or, if not necessary, then change the procedure to 1. Converting the video file

into an audio file; 2. permanently deleting the video file; 3. Using the audio file for interview transcription.

Please also justify why you may need a video recording when capturing the data.

My explanation:
I feel it is necessary to use video recording for the transcription of the interviews because the non-linguistic elements of communication will aid understanding of what was said. For example, participants may wish to gesticulate to demonstrate how passionately they feel about something where words alone do not feel sufficient to describe their meaning. Extra-discursive elements captured in the transcription regarding body language and facial expression are considered important to the process of interpreting participant's meaning and actions as described by Charmaz in 'Constructing Grounded Theory' (2014) and Shifting Grounds (2009). Knowing that I can use the video to aid transcription will mean that I can be more present with the participant thus avoiding the distraction of noting my participant's body language during the interview process – something Charmaz (2009) discourages. Although I could write what I remember of my client's non-verbal communication after the interview, I understand memory of emotionally laden topics can be particularly vulnerable to distortion. It would be helpful to ensure that (at least in part) the accuracy of my participant's visual/verbal communication can be preserved in the transcription process, supported by the video recording. In this way I will be able to co-construct from our interaction an understanding of how participants experience eco-anxiety.

4.4. & 6.2: you mention about using a dedicated mobile phone, please be clear with regard to what you will be doing with the dedicated mobile phone's line before and after the data was collected (especially that you mention in the debrief letter that the participant is "welcome" to contact you (presumably after the data collection took place.)

I will be using a new sim card in a dedicated mobile phone. After data collection the phone numbers of participants will be removed from the phone's memory card and the sim card will be destroyed. Participants are welcome to contact me via email after data collection has taken place.

I have altered this in sections 4.4, 6.2 and the debrief letter.

Recruitment poster: I believe that Data Protection Act (1998) was superseded by **Data Protection Act (2018).** Please change.

I have done this.

Participant invitation letter (third page): please complete the missing number: " between 40 to minutes"

I have changed this to 90 minutes.

Debrief letter (second page) – please change third bullet point - interviews will NOT be video recorded; they HAVE BEEN.

I have done this.

NB: please note the cited pages are as per the page numbering in the ethics form

I have also made the following amendments to the storage of data according to the most recent feedback I received on my data management plan from Penelope Jackson on June 22nd (just before it was submitted a final time and approved).

- "UEL's OneDrive for Business is recommended storage in a separate password protected file in separate folder from other data",
- "UEL storage is recommended for identifiable data, you have access to UEL's OneDrive for Business"

Original:
AES 256-bit encrypted internal storage on researcher's personal laptop and backed up on an external AES 256-bit encrypted flash storage device.

Updated in accordance with recommendation:
All data files will be stored on the researcher's personal laptop on UEL's
Data will be backed up on UEL's OneDrive for Business at least on a weekly basis.

Major amendments required *(for reviewer)*:

Confirmation of making the above minor amendments *(for students)*:

I have noted and made all the required minor amendments, as stated above, before starting my research and collecting data.

Student's name *(Typed name to act as signature)*: *Naomi Aston*
Student number: u1433372

Date: 9 July 2020

(Please submit a copy of this decision letter to your supervisor with this box completed, if minor amendments to your ethics application are required)

ASSESSMENT OF RISK TO RESEACHER *(for reviewer)*

Has an adequate risk assessment been offered in the application form?

YES

Please request resubmission with an adequate risk assessment

If the proposed research could expose the researcher to any of kind of emotional, physical or health and safety hazard? Please rate the degree of risk:

[ ] HIGH

Please do not approve a high risk application and refer to the Chair of Ethics. Travel to countries/provinces/areas deemed to be high risk should not be permitted and an application not approved on this basis. If unsure please refer to the Chair of Ethics.

[ ] MEDIUM (Please approve but with appropriate recommendations)

[x] LOW

Reviewer comments in relation to researcher risk (if any).

Reviewer *(Typed name to act as signature)*: Helena Bunn

Date: 8.7.20

This reviewer has assessed the ethics application for the named research study on behalf of the School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee

RESEARCHER PLEASE NOTE:

For the researcher and participants involved in the above named study to be covered by UEL's Insurance, prior ethics approval from the School of Psychology (acting on behalf of the UEL Research Ethics Committee), and confirmation from students where minor amendments were required, must be obtained before any research takes place.

For a copy of UELs Personal Accident & Travel Insurance Policy, please see the Ethics Folder in the Psychology Noticeboard

Appendix K. Findings Summary Sent to All Participants for Feedback

Table K1

Introduction: What Makes Eco-Anxiety Possible

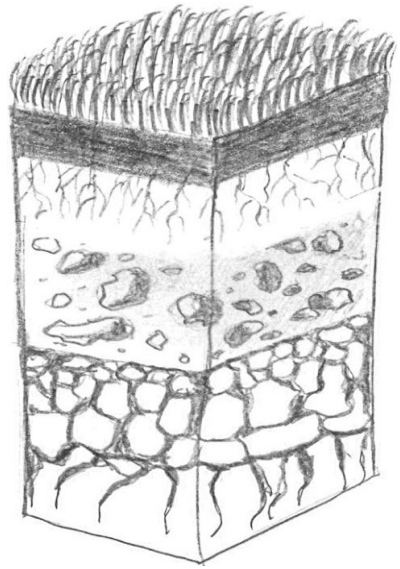
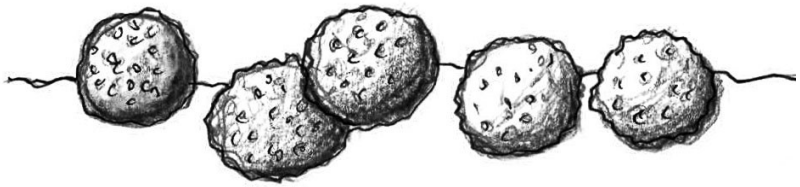
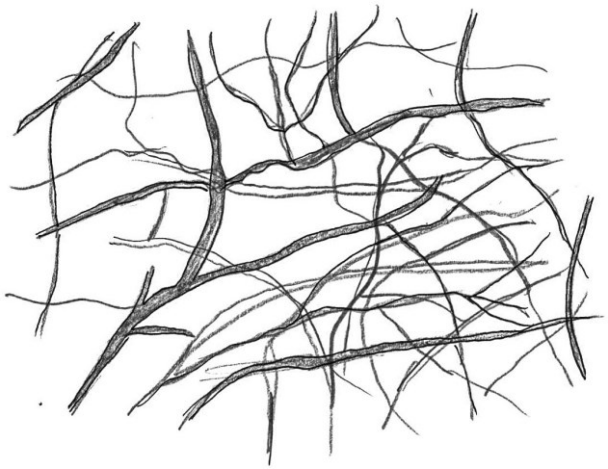
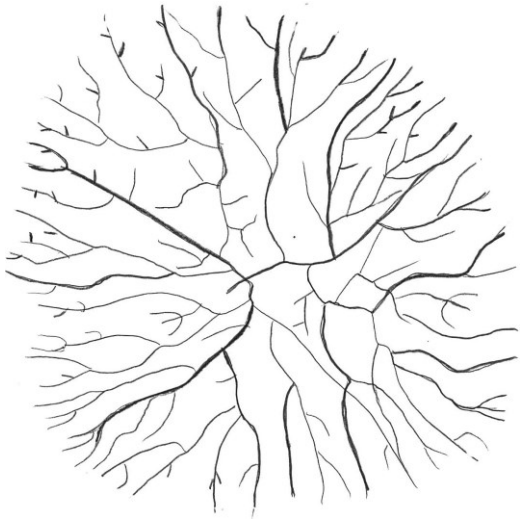
What Makes Eco-Anxiety Possible? *Tentative Mapping onto Fungi Growth Patterns*	**Components of Psychosocial Process**	**Corresponding Focused Codes**	**Mentions**	**Related Codes**	**Pts. that Mentioned**
Open minded, thoughtful, and caring awareness that we "haven't got it right in the West." *The soil is ready. Fungi thrive in somewhat acidic soil that is unlikely to be constantly disturbed, where perennial plants are already growing and providing nutrients.* 	**What**: Not attached to status quo, critical of existing ways of working, and aware of climate change	Longstanding awareness "we have been doing it wrong in the UK" in terms of inequality, social injustice, and causing climate change	43	19	13
		Nuanced thinking, seeing the big picture despite the complexity	27	21	8
	Why: Values for social justice and integrity	Values for integrity and truth	15	12	7
		Values for social justice	15	12	7
	How: Empathy for people and nature developed through difficult experiences and parental figures modelling biophilic values	Experience of growth following hardship	35	24	10
		Strong capacity to be empathic	22	24	7
		Early experiences of biophilia	14	4	8
	Outcome: May know about climate change, but distracted, hopeful, or in denial	Awareness of climate change, but also hopeful those with power will act as needed	43	6	13
		Awareness of climate change, and also distracted by responsibilities of work and family life	43	12	13

Table K2

Findings Summary of Core Code 1: The Psychosocial Processes of Eco-Anxiety

The Psychosocial Processes of Eco-Anxiety *Tentative Mapping onto Fungi Growth Patterns*	**Components of Psychosocial Process**	**Corresponding Focused Codes**	**Mentions**	**Related Codes**	**Pts. that Mentioned**
Spring. Hearing about climate change, paying attention to it because of values and time available, learning about it, and beginning to understand it. *Spores settle and multiply, using nutrients and water to form hyphae.* 	**What:** Gaining an intellectual understanding of climate change	Factual learning about climate change	48	37	12
	Why and How: Becoming aware and interested, having time to notice and study it personally	Being less busy or having more time to notice its importance	39	37	13
	Outcome: Acting on new awareness personally	Acting individually in an environmentally sustainable way	47	45	12

The Psychosocial Processes of Eco-Anxiety *Tentative Mapping onto Fungi Growth Patterns*	**Components of Psychosocial Process**	**Corresponding Focused Codes**	**Mentions**	**Related Codes**	**Pts. that Mentioned**
Summer. Learning more experientially and relationally, which resonates deeply. Starting to prioritise growth around this new learning to be congruent with self. *Hyphae multiply, meet other hyphae, and connect. The hyphae connect to self and others when growing together towards food.* 	**What:** Hearing, resonating, and feeling deeper emotions about climate change	Hearing others share about climate change and feeling resonance	33	20	12
		Learning how social injustice issues intersect with the climate crisis	49	36	9
	Why: Making time and space to learn because of realising my care	Making time and space to learn from others	20	15	8
	How: Learning experientially through witnessing someone speaking about the climate crisis with feeling	Attending groups, events, training, watching documentaries	48	21	13
		Learning through connecting with like-minded people with lived experience	41	14	11
	Outcome: Beginning to connect collective and social justice issues to the personal, and realising the need to do more than private actions	Understanding how the macro intersects with the individual	24	21	9
		Feeling a personal sense of guilt, responsibility, and regret	22	21	11
		Perceiving the climate crisis as both a personal and public issue.	13	13	8

The Psychosocial Processes of Eco-Anxiety *Tentative Mapping onto Fungi Growth Patterns*	**Components of Psychosocial Process**	**Corresponding Focused Codes**	**Mentions**	**Related Codes**	**Pts. that Mentioned**
Autumn. Eco-anxiety develops through more connection with others, action, and learning *Mycelium network (of hyphae) grows in all directions by feeding on nutrients at deeper levels of Earth, so that it a sprawling mass of webbing threads that bonds with other networks and tree roots.* 	**What:** The climate crisis becoming real when being struck by the enormity of it	Traumatic realisation that it is "worse than I thought"	38	12	13
		Feeling jolted awake to the enormity of the crisis	84	23	13
	Why: Engaging in public actions, learning more, committing more	Knowing we have the answers but lack the collective will	46	10	11
	How: Committing to action outside of comfort zone and realising the enormity of the crisis; opening a new level of emotional experiencing	Engaging in collective activism	59	23	13
		"Oh shit" moments of realising, "it is worse than I thought."	84	23	13
	Outcome: Feeling traumatised and alone, being very concerned about threat of social collapse, and feeling lost about what to do	Losing hope that those currently in power are going to act	46	19	11
		Being baffled by others' indifference	31	13	8
		Feeling most concerned about social collapse	13	10	4
		Seeing the rest of UK population in denial and feeling heavy sadness	12	11	7
		Feeling alone and isolated	6	9	5
		Feeling eco-fear	27	13	10
		Wanting to do something but not knowing what would be best	21	6	9

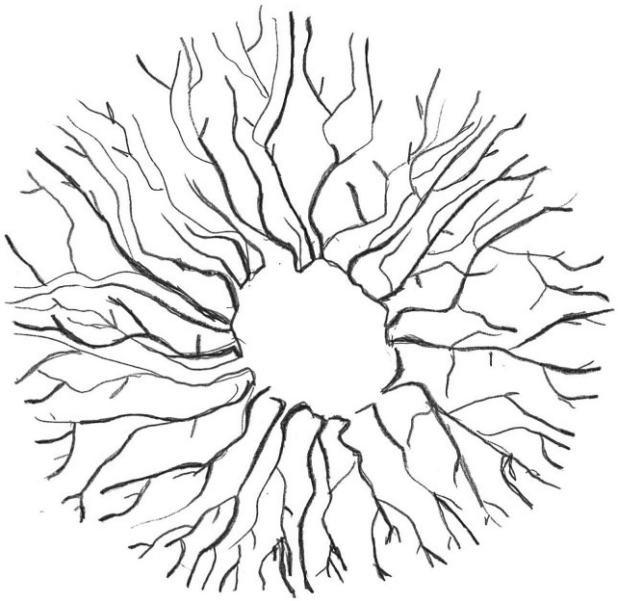
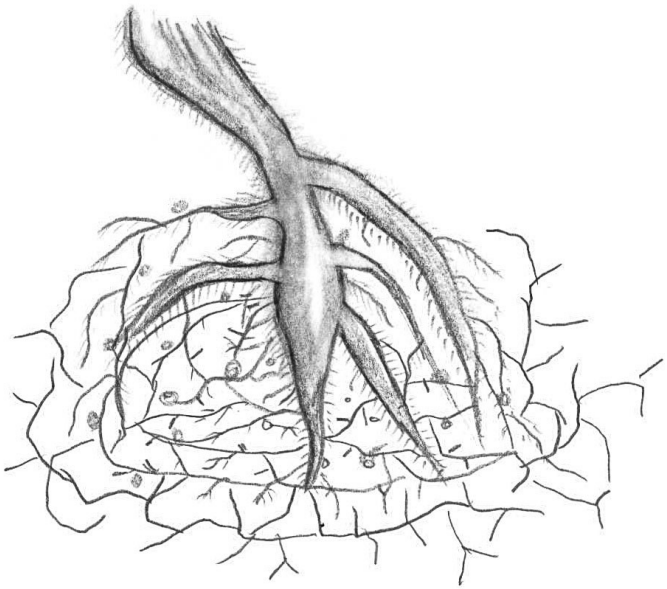
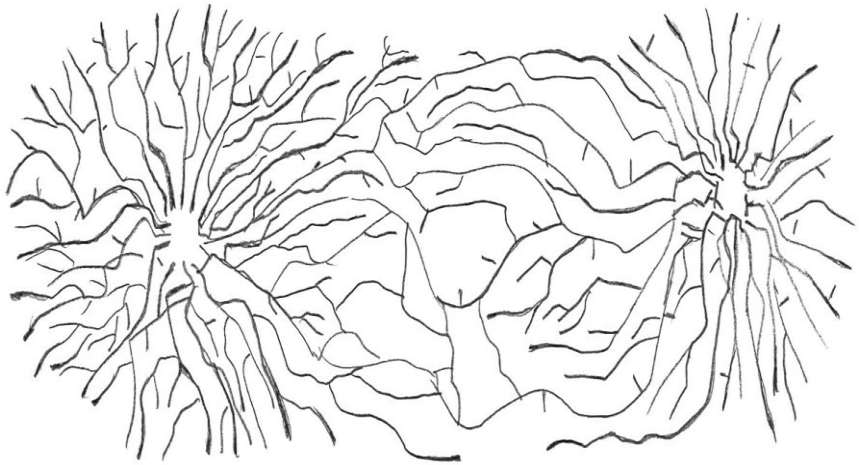
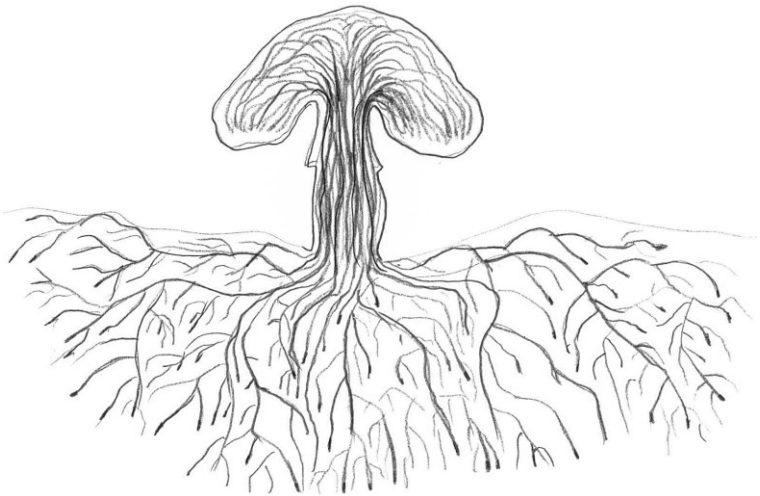
The Psychosocial Processes of Eco-Anxiety *Tentative Mapping onto Fungi Growth Patterns*	**Components of Psychosocial Process**	**Corresponding Focused Codes**	**Mentions**	**Related Codes**	**Pts. that Mentioned**
Winter. Grieving what has been lost through the climate crisis, which is an unavoidable part of conscious awareness. *When the resources that were abundant are gone or no longer nourishing, the mycelium network does not grow over the place of loss, covering the lack, but instead around the gaping hole in search of resources.* 	**What:** Sinking into deep grief	Sinking into a heightening grief	37	11	11
	Why: Accepting the hopelessness of the situation that it is too late to ignore	Being awake to hopelessness	35	30	11
		Grieving as a natural part of the process	31	14	10
		Believing we are feeling the grief all the time	17	6	5
	How: Participating in groups and connecting with others and other-than-human life	Grieving in collective spaces	26	8	8
	Outcome: Experiencing a spectrum of emotions and possibly feeling stuck in the darkness	Seeking to be with the grief rather than alleviate it	31	14	10
		Experiencing moments of seeing just the bad and feeling frozen	23	10	4

Table K3

Findings Summary of Core Code 2: The Psychosocial Processes of Regeneratively Sustained Eco-Anxiety

The Psychosocial Processes of Regeneratively Sustained Eco-Anxiety *Tentative Mapping onto Fungi Growth Patterns*	**Components of Psychosocial Process**	**Corresponding Focused Codes**	**Mentions**	**Related Codes**	**Pts. that Mentioned**
Spring. Building emotional tools towards wellbeing with self and others *The mycelium network finds tree roots, sugars, and structures to grow into, through and around obstacles to build strong networks oriented towards sources of food.* 	**What:** Learning tools to be with the emotions activated	Building emotional toolkit	61	23	11
	Why: Post climate grief, feeling there is no avoiding intense emotional responses to the climate crisis	Being with eco-anxiety becoming more important than reducing feelings	22	8	4
		Knowing denial is not an option	23	10	9
	How: Learning through training or relationships	Learning from those 'further along'	26	20	11
		Building self-awareness	63	26	11
	Outcome: Building self-awareness, emotional tolerance, and valuing growth through difficulty so we can act more effectively	Questioning capitalism and Western ways of coping	37	16	10
		Strengthening wellbeing and resilience	48	15	10

How Eco-Anxiety Can Be Regeneratively Sustained *Tentative Mapping onto Fungi Growth Patterns*	**Components of Psychosocial Process**	**Corresponding Focused Codes**	**Mentions**	**Related Codes**	**Pts. that Mentioned**
Summer. Connecting with others to enable big action that spreads knowledge and understanding *The mycelium become entangled with many tree root systems, benefiting from nutrients available, and creating a web of communication between the trees, which provides the resources to form mushrooms.* 	**What:** Finding community and working towards group action outside comfort zone	Connecting with others through groups e.g. The Work That Reconnects	33	20	6
		Taking action that feels resonant	24	15	7
	Why: Knowing eco-anxiety cannot be done alone or outside of connectedness and must be acted on	Knowing we cannot do it alone	21	21	10
		Needing community connection	35	15	11
	How: Learning from WTR groups, indigenous communities, stories, being with nature.	Realising need to reconnect personally with our reciprocity with nature	57	25	12
		Learning indigenous/non-Western ways of stewarding our interconnectedness and grief	21	14	7
	Outcome: Feeling unsure of what action to take	Feeling I am not doing enough	19	10	10
		Feeling unsure of what to do	23	12	9

How Eco-Anxiety Can Be Regeneratively Sustained *Tentative Mapping onto Fungi Growth Patterns*	**Components of Psychosocial Process**	**Corresponding Focused Codes**	**Mentions**	**Related Codes**	**Pts. that Mentioned**
Autumn. Reorganising based on what is healthy and nourishing of the self, other, and Earth. *Mycelium reorganises based on what nourishing or toxic substances it makes contact with in the soil. The mycelium moderates its immune responses to build resilience and support the whole network's growth. It produces mushrooms that produce and the spread spores.* 	**What:** Reprioritising life according to values, new self-awareness, and priorities	Prioritising life differently	46	14	12
		Sacrificing	53	44	10
		Negotiating social identity challenges of acting on eco-anxiety	47	22	10
	Why: Organising life according to the climate crisis, which integrates many values and interests, while anticipating social collapse	Values and interests converging on climate crisis	46	14	12
		Believing if we don't do anything, awareness and feelings will rot away	46	12	12
		Anticipating social collapse	41	7	10
	How: Acting congruently with values by sharing with others and family	Navigating challenges of sharing with others	41	18	10
	Outcome: Reconstructing social identity and relationship with sacrifice	Experiencing social intolerance of eco-anxiety	25	17	8
		Taking breaks and reassessing everything	22	12	9

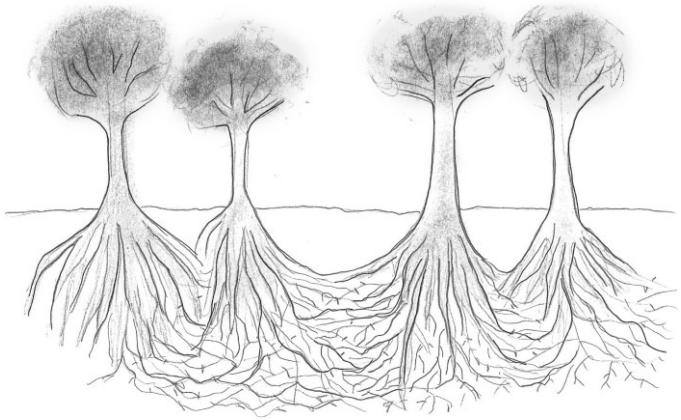
How Eco-Anxiety Can Be Regeneratively Sustained *Tentative Mapping onto Fungi Growth Patterns*	**Components of Psychosocial Process**	**Corresponding Focused Codes**	**Mentions**	**Related Codes**	**Pts. that Mentioned**
Winter. Learning to grieve together, to live with uncertainty, and to take uncomfortable action towards honouring our interconnectedness and love of life. *Mycelium moderate the immune responses of trees so it can merge with different types of root systems to build resilience and be interconnected with everything around it, enabling all to grow stronger together.* 	**What:** Grieving the loss of life, finding comfort in not knowing through connection and love	Experiencing love, pain, joy in caring	46	46	11
	How: Finding peace in connection, developing capacity to be with pain and capacity for joy through gratitude	Gratitude	43	30	10
		Noticing how valuable individual contribution is no matter how imperfect	33	16	10
		Deepening personal connection to nature	31	16	8
	Outcome: Feeling grateful for being awake and experiencing a life of connectedness	Tolerating distress and pain	55	21	10
		Tolerating uncertainty	44	16	12
		Being more present because of awareness of mortality	20	20	6
		Feeling peace and acceptance in my contribution	33	29	12
		Living aligned with values and experiencing a more resonant life	46	14	12

Table K4

Conclusion: The Outcomes of Experiencing Regeneratively Sustained Eco-Anxiety

Outcomes of Experiencing Regeneratively Sustained Eco-Anxiety	Components of Psychosocial Process	Corresponding Focused Codes	Mentions	Related Codes	Pts. that Mentioned
Growing strong to be with pain through love and joy 	Believing I am moving towards a richer experience of life, accepting that being my best self and living the change I want to see is significant.	Moving towards a rich, full life	25	24	8
		Feeling nurtured by nature	31	16	8
		Finding community where “I am there for them, and they are there for me”	13	13	7
		Holding compassion and empathy for others	70	48	10
		Finding the middle place between opposing dogmas	48	15	10
		Shape shifting through deepening spirals of expansive growth towards living the change “I want to see”	30	32	11
		Feeling I am always only just beginning	10	4	3

*Note***.** Details provided in the table related to fungi were gleaned from Sheldrake (2020) and Stamets (2005).

Why Map the Experience of Eco-Anxiety (Waking Up to The Climate Crisis) Onto the Growth Processes of Fungi?

1. Fungi do not have a linear or understood set stages of development. Their growth depends on their context, resources, and climate (Stamets, 2005).

2. Fungi are not fully understood by scientists but have prompted a new way of understanding intelligence and collective communication within the other-than-human world (Sheldrake, 2020).

3. The similarities between waking up to climate change and fungi growth seem to resonate with participants in follow-up interviews in confirming how important it is that we learn from nature in reorientating our relationship with the Earth/each other but also points to the uncertainty unknowingness that is required to continue to learn about mycelium networks beneath the surface of what is immediately obvious or visible above ground (Sheldrake, 2020).

References

Sheldrake, M. (2020). *Entangled life: how fungi make our worlds, change our minds & shape our futures*. Random House.

Stamets, P. (2005). *Mycelium running: how mushrooms can help save the world*. Random House Digital, Inc.

Appendix L. Excerpt of Example Interview Transcript and Initial Analysis

Time	Transcript Excerpt	Line-by-Line Codes	Initial Codes
[16:18] - Beech	Yeah. It feels. When when you do allow those brief, brief openings, and I believe I have a lot of work to do with that kind of processing that I understand now is a deep and valid grief that I think now is essential to be honoured and [N: hmm] with. But I understand when I have those openings how <u>deeply</u> connected, it is to love. [N: hm] And. Um. It's kind of inexplicable, the {sniffs} emotion that comes up and can it's not. And I believe it's difficult to express because it's not something in our culture that is very natural or practiced for us to express talking about... Love and about, you know, just for life itself and for [pause] hhhh yeah, {tearfully smiles} yeahhhh, [N: hmm] and deep, deep sense of gratitude and, {sniffle} um remorse [N: hm] that um it doesn't feel very linked tooo the thought process at all. {shakes her head} [N: hm] … It's a very <u>deeeep, deeep</u> Um. (pause) heavy a sense of awe [N: hm] and [pause] very humbling feeling [N: hm] (pause) And I think that's very, I have found for me, it's very hard to connect to that feeling alone. It's I. I feel like I'm only connecting to it right now because I feel like I'm speaking to someone who understands [N: yeah] and and that's what, yeah, has been so valuable about finding community and XR, you know, through things like what The Work That Reconnects and I did an ecopsychology course last year, [N: hm] and, um, yeah, so just having these opportunities to just be heard {nods head} and[N: hm] and, um, yeah, uh, felt understood [N: hm], um. It's the yeah, there's something about just the <u>collective honouring</u>, and I think that's	→Having brief openings →Doing the personal work →Processing a deep, valid grief →Honouring emotional responses →Openings deeply connected to love →Feeling inexplicable emotions →Difficulty expressing without the language →Culturally we do not talk about love →Loving life itself →Feeling a deep gratitude and remorse →Not being cognitively driven →Experiencing a deep heavy awe →Very humbling feeling →Connect with it individually is very difficult →Needing to speak with someone who understands → need collective, connection to like-minded others →Engaging in activism →Attending The Work That Reconnects →Learning about Ecopsychology →Having opportunities to be heard →Feeling understood in groups of like-minded →Collectively honouring as vital process	➢ Brief openings of awareness ➢ Love ➢ Inexplicable emotions ➢ Collective honouring to connect to eco-anxiety ➢ Emotional and Social rather than cognitive ➢ Very difficult to connect individually ➢ We all feel it ➢ In our isolation we experience harm ➢ Experiential Learning

Time	Transcript Excerpt	Line-by-Line Codes	Initial Codes
	what's so deeeeply, deeeeply harmful [N: hm] is the isolation that most people feel about it, um. I. I believe that <u>we're all feeling it</u> {wipes tear} All of us on some level, we're all just expressing it in different ways and connecting to it in different ways and reacting to it however, it's triggering us in different ways. And. Um. Did I answer your question?	→Belief that isolation is deeply harmful →Belief that we are all feeling climate change →Belief that we are all expressing, connecting, and reacting to it in different ways	➢ Sense of being trapped in complicity ➢ Personal but collective
[21:58] - Naomi	*Yes. [B: hhhh] Totally. Totally. You can't really go wrong. I mean, everything you're saying is gold. So yeah, it's just so helpful. and powerful. And is there…is there an image that comes to mind or a word or any way of describing eco-anxiety for you? What would you describe it as or see it or visualize it as?*		
[22:45] - Beech	Ah, I think the word anxiety doesn't immediately feel [inaudible – fit?]. [N: no hhhh] hhhhh um I think it is the right word. It. Yeah (pause) I. It is a deep, guttural kind of… its in Hhhh: its in my belly, in my gut, [N: hm] its deep <u>distressss</u> and trauma. (pause) It's the trauma of hhhh it's like. It's inherently traumatic isn't it, [N: hm] to be presented with what we are and beeee imprisoned at the same time, [N: hm] in this {inaudible} it imprisons us basically and makes us complicit in causing our own harm and. Um. Hhhh But um. Yeah, it feels it's like it's it's a tightness and it's despair, its having I think… it's it's born from this sense that there's nowhere to go, there are no solutions.	→Anxiety is an imperfect term →Anxiety is right word in part →Feeling deep, guttural distress and trauma →Feeling a deep distress inherently traumatic →Being presented with our complicity (identity) →Feeling imprisoned in our complicity in causing our own harm (powerless, guilty) →Feeling a tightness and despair →Feeling like there is nowhere to go →Having no solutions	➢ Trauma ➢ Embodied experience ➢ Identity and responsibility ➢ Powerlessness/ imprisoned ➢ Feeling despair

Note. Key: {body movement}, [overlap], ((laughter)), rising tone!!, <u>animated delivery</u>**,** Hhh=outbreath

Appendix M. Memo-writing Excerpts

After First Interview with Rowan

The interview experience was more moving than I expected.

Parallel process: It is striking to me that as she spoke about how important connection is in noticing how much she cared, our shared connection was enough for me to notice my own feelings about the climate crisis more acutely. I had not expected such an apparent lack of absolutist thinking, dogma or binary positioning, as if she feels comfortable with not knowing all the answers. She was empathic towards those who have numbed themselves to the crisis.

Process of interviewing: I initially found it difficult to be present while holding in mind the time available, questions, and script.

Charmaz Two-Way Interaction: Once I let go of what I personally wanted from the interview, my attention became less divided, and her answers seemed to become richer. At times my therapeutic skills came to the fore when there was an opportunity to validate her experience by reflecting back what I had heard. However, I enjoyed simply holding a reflective space that explored solely for the purpose of learning from and being with.

After Constructing Initial Codes for Second Interview with Beech

The more analysis I do, the more I feel my participants' emotion. I have felt tempted to resist this awareness by dividing my attention across different aspects of analysis at the same time. Thinking about which parts resonate with me and which parts are my projections is difficult and requires even more reflexivity than expected. However, reflection does help process the intensity of the feelings and helps me to stay open to the possibilities of new, conflicting, and ambiguous concepts arising.

I need to remain conscious of the language my participants and I use: 'resonates', 'regenerative' and 'trauma' are laden with clinical and non-clinical connotations. Seeking understanding of what these terms mean in interviews is essential for me to develop a deeper understanding of participants' experience. Searching the focused codes and initial codes related to these terms would help elucidate the lived experienced being shared.

After Follow-up Interview with Birch

After meeting Birch today, I recognised my desire to construct a 'neat theory' needs to be let go given the fluidity and uncertainty embedded throughout participants' spiralling process of living awake to the climate crisis. The divisions between 'seasons' of experience are completely artificial; although they are useful reference points, the experience is less linear, and it is not experienced in a vacuum. Instead, the experience plays out in the context of relationships and identity development. It is negotiated all the way through with constant movement 'forwards and backwards'. The debate about action vs 'being with' is too simplistic. What seems more important is the source/motivation of action. Sustaining eco-anxiety is less about trusting the self to act well; instead, it is more about trusting the self to learn how to be more aligned to life-giving values, what this looks like and means, and trusting the learning process. Rather than the focus of eco-anxiety being about the product of action, it is more about "the process of learning to live congruently", connected to and in relationship, where the burden of eco-anxiety is shared.

Appendix N. Iterative Process of Constructivist Grounded Theory

1. Complete interview
2. Write memo after interview and transcribe within 2 days
3. Construct ‘first pass’ line-by-line and initial codes in Microsoft Word document (see ‘Appendix M. Excerpt of Interview Transcript’ for example)
4. Construct ‘second pass’ line-by-line and initial codes using Atlas.TI
5. Compare ‘second pass’ codes (in Atlas.TI) with ‘first pass’ codes (in Microsoft Word) to identify inconsistencies and reflect on the researcher’s impact on the interview process and analysis
6. Group codes across all interviews to date to create focused codes, using sticky notes to remain close to the data (Charmaz, 2014).
7. Document definitions for each focused code in Atlas.TI
8. List emerging processes within each interview and across all interviews using Microsoft Excel to refine focused codes
9. Map focused codes onto seasons diagrammatically using Atlas.TI, as prompted by Yew’s sharing about seasonal experiencing of eco-anxiety
10. Map focused codes onto growth cycle of a tree, as prompted by participants (Acacia, Beech, and Birch) sharing about their learning from nature as part of their experience of eco-anxiety
11. Keep refining focused code definitions and grouping, and checking for inconsistencies and exceptions
12. Map psychosocial processes of eco-anxiety onto mycelium growth process because tree process is too linear, as observed by several participants
13. Check conceptual categories and theoretical interpretations with a third-party GT researcher to promote transparency and reflexivity in the research process
14. Read interview transcripts again to check initial codes, summarise each interview, identify poignant quotes for each participant, and document follow-up questions for participants
15. Further assess where the researcher may have led or influenced participants answers through verbal and non-verbal communication
16. Read interview transcripts and questions again before and after follow-up interviews with participants

Glossary

Climate Change

Key terms used to within the environmental movement

Climate	"The mean and variability of temperature, precipitation, cloud cover, and wind or broadly the state of the atmosphere (gaseous envelope surrounding the Earth), hydrosphere (water on the surface of the Earth), cryosphere (snow, ice, and permafrost on and beneath the surface of the Earth and ocean), land surface, and biosphere (ecosystems and organisms living in the atmosphere, land, and oceans)". (Swim et al., 2009, p.220)
Climate & Ecology Bill	A UK Parliament Private Members' Bill, commonly referred to as the "Climate and Ecological Emergency Bill". This proposes legislation to commit the UK to take responsibility for its 'fair share' of greenhouse gas emissions, actively restore biodiverse habitats, and prevent damage to the natural world through production, transport, and disposal of goods (UK Parliament, 2021).
Climate Change	Climate change refers to the accelerated heating of global average temperatures due to increased carbon dioxide and methane emissions resulting from human activities such as use of fossil fuels, deforestation, and agriculture (IPCC, 2021).
Climate Induced Social Collapse	The fall of industrial consumer societies resulting in "starvation, destruction, migration, disease and war" (Bendell, 2018, p.13).
Climate Justice	The environmental justice movement is based on a two-way relationship: "protecting the environment is a social justice activity because marginalised communities are hit hardest by pollution" and "it is the social, economic and power marginalisation of communities that opens weak spots in the enforcement of environmental protection" (Mihaylov & Perkins, 2015, p.124). Climate justice is argued to require long-term mitigation and adaption to climate change that addresses the inequalities and unethical practices driving climate change.

Culture of Uncare and Exceptionalism	A term coined by Sally Weintrobe (2021) to refer to the neoliberal culture and systems that work to promote selfish and uncaring ways of being with one another, which can lead to a distorted inner representation of the external world.
Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)	An international group of scientists who summarise the current understanding of climate change to help offer a conservative prediction of how the climate will evolve over time to inform policy and climate-related decision making. This group are part of the World Meteorological Organization and the United Nations Environment Program founded in 1988 (Swim et al., 2009).
Tipping Points	A threshold at which change that once met could be irreversible or difficult to predict due to the unprecedented nature of the triggered chain-reaction responses within the climate (IPCC, 2018).

Ecopsychology

Key terms used to refer to emotional responses to Climate Change

Eco-anxiety	The spectrum of emotional, mental or somatic responses to the scientific evidence and realities of the climate crisis (Hickman, 2020; Hogg et al., 2021; Pihkala, 2020).
Biophilia	An emotional attachment towards and care for all living things." (Clayton & Myers, 2009, p. 207).
Deep Ecology	"A philosophical position that encourages a sense of identity that transcends the individual and encompasses the ecosystem, striving for a sense of similarity or shared community with the rest of nature" Clayton & Myers, 2009, p. 208).
Ecological grief	"The grief felt in relation to experienced or anticipated ecological losses, including the loss of species, ecosystems and meaningful landscapes due to acute or chronic environmental change" (Cunsolo & Ellis, 2018, p.275).
Ecological stress	The psychological impacts of facing the threats of climate change (Helm et al., 2018).
Ecology	"The reciprocal relationship among all organisms and their biological and physical environments" (Steiner, 2016, p.2).

Ecopsychology	"Theory and research about how individual experience (particularly perception) is constituted by intimate and often biologically entrenched relations to constant environmental patterns" (Clayton & Myers, 2009, p. 210).
Environmental distress	The bio-psycho-social cost of ecological degradation (Higginbotham, Connor, Albrecht, Freeman, & Agho, 2006).
Global warming worry (aspect of eco-anxiety)	"Habitual worry about global warming that comes with positive as well as negative emotions" (Verplanken et al., 2020, p.1).
Pre-traumatic stress disorder	A before-the-fact form of traumatic stress disorder for those who anticipate disaster "may be just around the corner" and are bombarded by mental images depicting future tragedy (Van Susteren & Al-Delaimy, 2021, p.178).
Regenerative Climate Culture	Developing an understanding of how we can help people, […] look after themselves, look after each other, develop good relationships with each other, help support the community […] It also spills over into climate justice (Participant, Yew) [450-453].
Solastalgia	The distress experienced when faced with the degradation of valued environments or places through physical devastation and can result in a sense of psychological loss of one's sense of self (Albrecht, 2011).