THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE:
AN IN-DEPTH INVESTIGATION

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Thoughts and feelings about climate change: an in-depth investigation
Abstract

This thesis is based on the hypothesis that little is being done to address the problems of climate change and that these problems are widely denied. It provides a qualitative investigation of thoughts and feelings about climate change and the environment from single interviews with twenty opportunistically chosen participants. It employs psycho-social methodology to combine psychoanalytical, sociological, cultural and ecological theory.

My original contributions to knowledge are:

Firstly, all my participants employed diverse forms of denial of the need to mitigate climate change and environmental damage, and defended their non-environmental behaviour. They negated their knowledge by disregarding their non-environmental behaviour, sometimes feeling entitled to act in that way. They disavowed knowledge by resisting awareness, treating facts as non-existent or irrelevant, or disclaiming responsibility.

Secondly, early experiences had shaped the thoughts and feelings of some participants about climate change and the environment. Environmental interest sometimes coincided with a strong childhood relationship with an environmentally minded parent and an attachment to a particular country area. Some, having had active, enthusiastic parents, felt optimistic and empowered to engage with climate change. Others, without such influences, felt pessimistic and disempowered. Among participants there was apparently little ecological awareness, or understanding of the ecologies of mind, society and nature.

Thirdly, all participants had complex, ambivalent and contradictory thoughts and feelings about climate change. We are all implicated and all can contribute to mitigating climate change, particularly by being willing to talk about it.

Fourthly, my analysis of the data draws on psychoanalytical, psychological, sociological, cultural and ecological theory and research, and uses psycho-social methodology to produce
an in depth investigation of thoughts and feelings about climate change. This has supported and confirmed theories of denial from different schools of thought, and has illustrated similarities between them.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friend’s or of thine own were. Any man’s death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind; and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.

John Donne (1959: 108) combined an inward, psychological perspective on death, a social perspective, describing how we are part of each other and affected by each other’s deaths, and drew on the metaphor of the loss of a part of the land, not just of England but of Europe too. In this way he drew together a psychological, a social and an environmental perspective that encapsulates my quest for an approach to an understanding of people’s thoughts and feelings about climate change.

Introduction to the form and content of this thesis

This section outlines how this thesis is organised. This chapter, Chapter 1, introduces the thesis.

Chapters 2 and 3 introduce theories that may apply to understanding thoughts and feelings about climate change and the environment. Chapter 2 describes relevant psychological and psychoanalytic theories and research. Chapter 3 outlines sociological and cultural theories that can apply to climate change and the environment, beginning where psychoanalysis and sociology overlap. I review sociological theories of denial and of interpretive communities, and explore interpretive communities further in considering cultural theory and related theoretical analyses. I finish Chapter 3 by considering some views of ecology and of the ecologies of mind, society and the natural world. I conclude that there are considerable similarities and overlaps between psychoanalytic and sociological theories of denial.

Chapter 4 describes the methodology I have applied in my research. Appendix I introduces some of the participants on whose interview data I have drawn on. Chapter 5 provides an in-depth study of interview data from two of my participants, showing how their thoughts and feelings about climate change form part of their overall world views. In Chapter 6 I analyse the
many different forms of climate change denial that my participants express, drawn from the full range of interview data.

In Chapter 7 I explore data regarding my participants’ thoughts and feelings about social and economic factors relating to climate change. In Chapter 8 I explore three factors from interview data that seem connected: a rural childhood environment, maternal or other familial influences, and a pro-environmental attitude. This contrasts with an urban upbringing, similar family influences, and indifference towards the environment. In Chapter 9 I provide an analysis of my findings, and I draw out some conclusions about them in Chapter 10. Appendix I introduces seven other participants upon whose data I have drawn substantially, as well as the two participants whose data I analyse in depth in Chapter 5.

Climate change

A vast volume of research has investigated the complexities of climate change. The Fifth Assessment Report of The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC 2014), the outcome of a vast volume of research and the fifth report since 1990, concluded that ‘warming of the climate system is unequivocal’ (IPCC 2014: 2). Anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions have increased since the pre-industrial era, leading to ‘atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide … unprecedented in the last 800,000 years’. Their effects are ‘extremely likely to have been the dominant cause of the observed warming since the mid-20th century’ (IPCC 2014: 4). ‘Continued emission of greenhouse gases will cause further warming and long-lasting changes in all components of the climate system, increasing the likelihood of severe, pervasive and irreversible impacts for people and ecosystems.’ (IPCC 2014: 8) ‘Many aspects of climate change and associated impacts will continue for centuries, even if anthropogenic emissions of greenhouse gases are stopped.’ (IPCC 2014: 16)

J. Cook et al. (2013: 3–5) examined 11,944 climate abstracts from 1991–2011 matching the topics ‘global climate change’ or ‘global warming’, and found that 66.4% of them expressed no position on Anthropogenic Global Warming (AGW), 32.6% endorsed AGW, 0.7% rejected AGW and 0.3% were uncertain about its causes. Among abstracts expressing a position on AGW, 97.1% endorsed the consensus position that humans are causing global warming.

Interested readers can access the basic facts by following the video links in Appendix II.
Metaphors of atmospheric pollution in art and literature

In art and literature we can trace the growing awareness of the atmospheric destruction attendant upon modernity which was to result in the disaster of climate change. Smog, defined as fog mixed with smoke, polluted large industrial cities throughout the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century. The ‘Great Smog’ of December 1952 may have killed as many as 12,000 people. The resulting Clean Air Act of 1956 regulated smoke emissions, and enabled ‘smokeless zones’ to be established. Though smogs have been recorded since 1813 (Mosley 2014), it took nearly a century and a half to take action to prevent them. But while smog is relatively local, immediate and inescapable, atmospheric CO₂ is global, invisible and insidious, and only detectable by scientific analysis, which makes the challenge of responding to the problem much greater.

Dickens’s rhetorical description of fog in *Bleak House* – what today is called smog – expressed its destructiveness and acted as a metaphor for the obscure functioning of the Victorian Court of Chancery, now obsolete but then still part of the legal system. Today the paradigms of neo-liberal economics and commitment to growth might be seen as equivalently out-of-date destructive social mechanisms that obstruct necessary action to mitigate climate change.

Smoke lowering down from chimney-pots, making a soft black drizzle, with flakes of soot in it as big as full-grown snowflakes—gone into mourning, one might imagine, for the death of the sun … Fog everywhere. Fog up the river, where it flows among green aits and meadows; fog down the river, where it rolls defiled among the tiers of shipping and the waterside pollutions of a great (and dirty) city … The raw afternoon is rawest, and the dense fog is densest, and the muddy streets are muddiest near that leaden-headed old obstruction, appropriate ornament for the threshold of a leaden-headed old corporation, Temple Bar. And hard by Temple Bar, in Lincoln’s Inn Hall, at the very heart of the fog, sits the Lord High Chancellor in his High Court of Chancery … Never can there come fog too thick, never can there come mud and mire too deep, to assort with the groping and floundering condition which this High Court of Chancery, most pestilent of hoary sinners, holds this day in the sight of heaven and earth. (Dickens 1853: 1–2)
Monet found beauty in the thick fog that shrouded the Houses of Parliament.


T. S. Eliot used the metaphor of fog to introduce The Waste Land. He associated the ‘brown fog’ with the ‘Unreal City’ and death that had ‘undone so many’ (Eliot 1922: 60–5):

Unreal City,
Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,
A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
I had not thought death had undone so many.
Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled,
And each man fixed his eyes before his feet.

Whereas painters can see beauty in polluted skies and atmospheres, writers bring out the destructive, deadly nature of industrial pollution. By contrast, atmospheric carbon dioxide cannot be touched, seen, smelt or tasted. It is an essential component of our atmosphere, making plant growth possible through photosynthesis, but increasing atmospheric carbon dioxide causes and exacerbates anthropogenic climate change.
The image below illustrates the magnitude of carbon dioxide emissions. It has been calculated that one tonne of CO$_2$ would meet the energy use of an average house for 28.08 days, enable a 747 to fly for 1.89 minutes non-stop, and an average car to be driven for 38.85 hours non-stop (YouSustain 2016).


Man’s turn to extracting and using fossil fuels in the second half of the eighteenth century eventually largely replaced slavery and made the Industrial Revolution possible (Mouhot 2011: 331). Fog and smog was the product. It took two centuries to reverse the palpable ill-effects of discharging coal soot and waste into the atmosphere. However, if atmospheric pollution is to be reversed, it will be necessary to stop the discharge of carbon dioxide much more quickly than happened with smog. The contrast between visual representations of coal-based smog and carbon dioxide shows that, unlike smog, carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is undetectable.
without scientific analysis. Therefore campaigners face the problem of how to bring carbon dioxide increases and climate change to the notice of the public.

**Environmentalists in late-nineteenth-century drama**

The way that environmentalists are represented in the plays *Uncle Vanya* (Chekhov 1987), first published in 1897, and *A Public Enemy* (Ibsen 1964), published in 1882, illustrates the extent to which they have been equivocal figures since the nineteenth century. In *Uncle Vanya*, Astrov – a disillusioned and heavy-drinking doctor, and a regular visitor to the Serebryakov family – is more interested in the damage being inflicted on the Russian environment than in his work as a doctor. He describes feelingly how ‘The forests grow ever fewer; the rivers parch; the wild life is gone; the climate is ruined; and with every passing day the earth becomes uglier and poorer’ (Chekhov 1987: 10). He falls in love with the Professor’s young, beautiful second wife Yelena, but Yelena only pretends to an interest in his environmental activities in order to investigate his feelings about Professor Serebryakov’s daughter Sonya, who loves Astrov.

In Ibsen’s play *A Public Enemy*, Thomas Stockman discovers and publicises that the water supply for the baths he oversees is contaminated. Initially he is widely praised for this, but when the newspaper editor who first supported him realises that it could ruin the town’s economy, he turns against him and supports his brother, the mayor, who urges him to keep quiet. The town turns against Stockman and he loses job and home. Stockman can be seen both as a man standing up for what is right against people seeking to silence inconvenient truths, and as an omnipotent figure, brought down by his own grandiosity.

These portrayals of environmentalists still hold good today. The views of individuals like Astrov can be treated as mildly eccentric and irrelevant to other people’s day-to-day concerns. People like Stockman can be seen as dangerous and can pay a high price for their environmentalism. In Chapter 3 I describe how Zerubavel (2006) identified the way those who defy society’s taboo subjects by talking about them can be silenced by being discredited or ridiculed. Many of my participants, as described in Chapters 5 and 6, do not want to be identified as extremist or as lecturing others about environmental concerns.

**Threats of catastrophe**

Threats of catastrophe play a significant role in some people’s thoughts and feelings about climate change. In a sketch by Peter Cook in the revue *Beyond the Fringe* (W. Cook ed. 2003: 50–1; see Appendix II: Beyond the Fringe 1961 Youtube video), followers of a millennial cult
on a mountain top eagerly anticipate the end of the world as its leader describes the forthcoming terrible events. When the time arrives and nothing happens, he says, ‘it’s not quite the conflagration we’d been banking on … same time tomorrow, we must get a winner one day’ (W. Cook ed. 2003: 51). Thus some people are fascinated by threats of violent catastrophic change. Equally, such threats cannot be disproved.

**Thoughts and feelings about climate change**

The facts of climate change are widely available and accepted, yet there is little sense of urgency among the general public to mitigate climate change by reducing CO₂ emissions. On 3 May 2015 the Observer newspaper published a survey of thoughts and feelings about climate change based on 1,011 online interviews conducted in March 2015 (Observer Tech Monthly 2015). This revealed that people were becoming increasingly concerned, yet – while most believed that individuals can take action on man-made climate change – it was very low on most people’s order of priorities. Over three quarters believed that man-made emissions are causing rising global temperatures; nearly three quarters believed climate change will threaten global stability within fifty years; and while nearly half of those aged 18 to 34 were more concerned than they had been five years earlier, only just over a quarter of those over 34 were. Over two thirds believed that individuals can have an impact on reversing climate change, yet merely one in twenty placed the environment among the top three issues facing Britain in the May 2015 General Election. Doherty and Webler (2016) found that, although few individuals who are highly concerned about climate change take action to influence public policies, the belief that similar others took action increased behaviour and strengthened beliefs in efficacy, which also led to greater action on climate change.

Powerful vested interests advance contrarian or climate change sceptic arguments. Oreskes and Conway (2010: 190–215) documented how scientists had applied methods to discredit the increasingly overwhelming evidence for climate change, along with the scientists who produced the evidence – methods previously used to discredit evidence linking tobacco to cancer. Farrell (2015: 4) found that ‘the successful production and diffusion of contrarian information has a particular network structure and corporate influence. Network power and semantic influence … is concentrated within a smaller group of organizations with ties to particular actors in the private sector.’

Figure 1 represents changing attitudes towards the nature of the threat from global warming. Gallup has repeatedly asked Americans if they think that the seriousness of global warming is
exaggerated, underestimated or generally correct. This shows the score for the belief that the threat is exaggerated holding roughly steady, while belief in the threat being underestimated increases at the expense of belief in the threat being correct.

**Figure 1:** The threat of global warming is generally...EXAGGERATED....CORRECT....UNDERESTIMATED (Bump 2016)

This figure has been redacted due to copyright restrictions.

Nevertheless, many surveys (like the Observer survey quoted above) repeatedly show that climate change is low in the order of many people’s priorities. This thesis seeks to understand and explore this paradox: a widespread awareness of climate change yet little sense of urgency among the public.

**Aims and objectives**

I began my study for this PhD with a set of wide-ranging and ambitious objectives, outlined in Chapter 10, which included the aim of comparing the power of explanations drawing upon cultural theory and psychoanalysis. Of these, I have only been able to deal with the influence of family, the question of concern for future generations, and views of the science of climate change, in my research (which has still yielded some relevant findings). Doing the research has led me to more limited but realisable objectives. Nevertheless my original research questions have to some extent provided me with an enduring compass for conducting my investigation. In summary, my research aims and objectives have evolved over time even if my research questions have remained relatively persistent. I would now describe my overall research aim as ‘to examine family, social and economic factors (including unconscious factors) affecting people’s thoughts and feelings for or against action on climate change and the environment’.

I have been able to apply psychological and psychoanalytic theory in ways I had expected. I have deepened my understanding of sociological and ecological perspectives, which has allowed me to place cultural theory and similar theories – and their limitations – within the context of theories of interpretive communities. These support shared, socially acceptable ways of behaving that become unconscious unquestioned habitual behaviours (I explore this concept further in Chapter 3). This has led to my developing a more complex range of theoretical perspectives.
The psychoanalytic theory of internal object relations – representations of relationships with parents and others from early life that affect present day relationships – could be seen as uniting these psychological and sociological perspectives (I describe this concept more fully in Chapter 2). Although my sample of participants is non-randomised and opportunistic, I believe that, taken together, the data from interviews illustrates a wide range of thoughts and feelings about climate change and the environment, and the many forms that denial of the need for action on climate change and the protection of the environment can take.

Citations

Where a document I have cited has no page or paragraph numbering, I have cited the document without reference to numbering.
Chapter 2: Psychological Perspectives

Introduction: psychology and psychoanalysis

Chapters 2 and 3 are concerned with research and theory pertinent to my research. In this Chapter I will consider two bodies of psychological theory about thoughts and feelings regarding climate change, which, together with the sociological theories outlined in Chapter 3, will provide a framework for my analysis of my interview data described in Chapters 5 to 9.

One theoretical approach is cognitive and behavioural, mainly based on quantitative research through large-scale survey questionnaires founded in academic psychology and drawing upon positivist traditions. This produces a broad overall perspective of the issue and reveals factors, mainly attributable to underlying anxiety, such as the remoteness of the problem; distrust, suspicion and uncertainty about the scientific facts; despair about the problem; projecting responsibility onto others; selective interpretation of the facts; and guilt and anxiety. These findings helped me to decide on which areas of thoughts and feelings about climate change and the environment to focus in my research.

The other theoretical approach draws upon hermeneutic traditions, founded in the clinical practice of psychoanalysis. It focuses on feelings and defences and is devoted to reaching deeper understanding of meaning. This thesis will show the potential contribution of psychoanalytic thinking to understanding factors underlying thoughts and feelings about climate change. Neither approach is superior to the other; in this thesis I argue that the two offer valuable complementary accounts.

There has been considerable quantitative and some qualitative psychological research into thoughts and feelings about climate change, and a growing body of psychoanalytic theory on the subject but little corresponding psychoanalytic research.

Psychological research findings

This section summarises the considerable, mainly quantitative, published research concerning thoughts and feelings about climate change. Many studies found that people in a number of Western countries see climate change as distant in space and time, secondary to their immediate concerns, and not immediately threatening (Lorenzoni and Pidgeon, with others, in a number of articles; Lorenzoni,
Research also suggested that people are uncertain and confused about the facts of climate science. Many studies, for example, exposed how people confuse damage to the ozone layer with anthropogenic climate change (APA n.d.: 48; Lorenzoni and Pidgeon 2006: 78–9; Stoll-Kleemann, O’Riordan and Jaeger 2001: 113).

It has been found that the public tend to mistrust the media, governments, businesses, industry and sometimes experts (Lorenzoni and Pidgeon 2006: 85; Lorenzoni, Nicholson-Cole and Whitmarsh 2007: 452) as regards environmental issues and risks.

Widespread feelings of fatalism, despair and helplessness were reported in several studies (APA n.d.: 41; Hamilton and Kasser 2009: 3–4; Lorenzoni, Nicholson-Cole and Whitmarsh 2007: 452; Stoll-Kleemann, O’Riordan and Jaeger 2001: 113–14).


Several researchers found widespread overt anxiety about climate change, and various ways that people deny anxiety or guilt, including apparent indifference and the avoidance of unwelcome information or thoughts (Lorenzoni and Pidgeon 2006: 75; Hamilton and Kasser 2009: 1; Lertzman 2008).

The American Psychological Association study (American Psychological Association n.d.: 47, 77–8, 107–9) reported how individuals interpreted their world selectively. Norgaard’s (2011: 63–95) ethnographic study, which I explore in more depth in Chapter 3, showed how a rural community in Norway interpreted their lives and world selectively, minimising their responsibility regarding climate change.

Most of these findings find expression in my research interviews.
Psychological theories pertinent to climate change

Social psychological theories describe ways that groups function within society; behavioural theories seek to explain individual behaviour. They can both explain aspects of thoughts and feelings about climate change. I have outlined some of these below.

Social psychological explanations

i) Social dominance

Pratto et al. (1994: 754–8) argued that societies minimise group conflict by establishing a consensus which promotes one group’s superiority over others. This maintains group inequality, legitimises discrimination and can be widely accepted as self-apparent truths; hence the term ‘hierarchy-legitimizing myths’ (741). They found that men are more social dominance-oriented than women. High social dominance orientation (SDO) people seek hierarchy-enhancing professional roles and low-SDO people seek hierarchy-attenuating roles (747–8). SDO was related to beliefs that support group-based hierarchy, but not correlated with empathy, tolerance, communality and altruism (751–3). These findings correspond with aspects of cultural theory described in Chapter 3.

ii) Identity-protective cognition

Kahan et al. (2007: 480–2) argued that ‘identity-protective cognition’ can explain why ‘white men fear certain risks less than women and minorities’ do (the ‘white male effect’). Individuals selectively accept or dismiss different dangers in a way that supports their preferred form of social organisation. Drawing on cultural theory, Kahan et al. found that hierarchical and individualistic white males are risk sceptic when activities integral to their cultural identities are challenged (485). Kahan’s study confirmed that cultural worldviews interact with the impact of gender and race on risk perception, in patterns that suggest cultural-identity-protective cognition.

Social dominance and identity-protective cognition theories, allied with cultural theory, might explain why a socially dominant conservative cultural group resists notions of anthropogenic climate change which might challenge its members’ received values, expressed in individualist free-market or hierarchical attitudes.
iii) Motivated reasoning

Kunda (1990: 482–90) described biased strategies for forming beliefs, which might affect reasoning. Where people aimed to be accurate about any issue, this enhanced their use of appropriate beliefs and strategies; but if they could construct seemingly reasonable justifications for their conclusions, they would reach conclusions that they wanted. Taber and Lodge (2006: 760) found that prior attitudes affected how citizens evaluate arguments about affirmative action and gun control. Participants saw arguments they agreed with as stronger than those they disagreed with, accepted them uncritically, and disputed contrary arguments. Both the confirmation and disconfirmation biases lead to attitudes becoming polarised, especially among those with the strongest prior attitudes.

Marshall showed how motivated reasoning could apply to thoughts and feelings about climate change. He described Lord, Ross and Lepper’s ‘biased assimilation’ (1979: 2105–6), whereby we select information and shape facts to conform with our pre-existing points of view. Marshall (2014: 15) described how flood victims interpret floods differently depending on their views of climate change, and how Labour voters were twice as likely as Conservatives to ascribe extreme weather to climate change. Motivated reasoning could explain doubts about anthropogenic climate change, as well as uncritical adherence to millenarian views of climate catastrophe. I explore millenarian views of catastrophic climate change in Chapter 3.

Behavioural explanations

iv) Learned helplessness

Maier and Seligman (1976: 4) showed that dogs exposed to inescapable electric shocks in one situation later failed to learn to escape shock in a situation where they could escape, because the original shocks were uncontrollable. When events are uncontrollable, the organism learns that its behaviour and its outcomes are separate and distinct. Hiroto and Seligman (1975: 321–4) found there was ‘learned helplessness’ when they experimented with the effects of uncontrollable events across different tasks and motivational systems.

Peterson, Seligman and Vaillant (1988: 25) investigated the ‘explanatory styles’ by which individuals explain bad events. Pessimistic explanatory styles, e.g. the belief that stable, global and internal factors cause bad events, predicted poor health aged 45 to 60; pessimism in early adulthood appeared to be linked with poor health in middle and late adult life. Alloy et al. (1984: 685–6) found that people who attribute negative outcomes to specific factors will show helplessness in similar situations.
v) Supernormal stimuli

Barrett (2010) proposed the concept of ‘supernormal stimuli’. In prehistoric times, people would be compelled to action by horrifying events as a matter of life and death vital for their safety but today most events in the news do not affect us personally or are too abstract for us to calculate their threat. Barrett suggested that instincts originally emerged to get our attention for rare events, but now such instincts can cause us to be drawn to attention-grabbing phenomena.

Learned helplessness theory (which suggests potential behavioural and neurological causes) and the idea of supernormal stimuli could help to explain helpless and despairing responses to the seeming inevitability of climate change with its possible catastrophic consequences.

Psychoanalytic theory, denial and climate change

This section describes aspects of psychoanalysis, one of the bases of psycho-social methodology, and introduces some basic psychoanalytic concepts. Psychoanalysis provides a clear and thorough analysis of denial. I focus on negation and disavowal – aspects of psychoanalytic denial – and consider some of the ways that psychoanalytic theory has been applied to thoughts and feelings about climate change. I then describe how psychoanalytic theory has been applied to environmental questions and to the operation and effects of culture on the individual.

Psychoanalytic concepts

The dynamic of psychoanalysis

Freud’s thought changed and developed over his lifetime, but throughout his writings he adhered steadfastly to the principle of dynamic psychological conflict: first, the conflict between the pleasure and reality principles (S. Freud, 1911: 219–22); then between the id and the superego (S. Freud 1925b: 33–5); and finally between the life and death instincts (S. Freud, 1920: 44–60). He saw the reality principle operating to manage and suppress the pleasure principle, in order to conform to the requirements of the external world. This process has parallels with Norgaard’s (2011) concept of selective interpretation (see Chapter 3 below). Her subjects submitted to pressures to conform, controlled their exposure to information, conformed to social norms of talk and avoided unpleasant emotions by not thinking about them. This also resembles Orwell’s (2013: 40–1) ‘doublethink’, with its implication of the necessity to actually think opposite thoughts at the same time (see ‘Disavowal’, below in this section). These are examples of ways in which social and cultural factors overlap with psychological ones.
The death instinct

Freud introduced his concept of the death instinct tentatively and late on in his life. The death instinct – opposed to the life instinct – strives towards the reduction of tensions to zero-point: to bring the living being back to the inorganic state (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1988: 97). It is directed inwards, self-destructively, but later turns towards the outside world in the form of the aggressive or destructive instinct. Melanie Klein (Klein 1946: 100–1) and the post-Kleinians made the opposition of the life and death instincts a central part of their theories.

Internal object relations

The concept of object signifies a mental representation of a person of particular, originally libidinal, significance to an individual. Object relations theory describes how an individual unconsciously represents him- or herself as in a relationship with his or her object, based on infancy and early childhood experience; it suggests that such early relationships shape the individual’s current relationships, particularly his or her intimate relationships.

Paranoid–schizoid and depressive positions

Klein (1946: 99–108) proposed the theory of a movement from a paranoid–schizoid towards a depressive position, and a movement back and forth between the two. Fairbairn (1952: 145–6) saw paranoia as the result of a split between the idealisation of the self and the projection of everything bad onto the object. An individual in Klein’s paranoid–schizoid position operates in this way. The depressive position is achieved by reconciling the split between good and bad: accepting painful realities, sadness and regret, and moving towards a more mature and integrated attitude towards life and relationships. Klein saw psychotic anxiety as resulting from the conflict between the death instinct’s attacks on the object, and concern for the object. This is close to Freud’s idea of the interplay between the pleasure principle and the reality principle.

Regression

Regression can mean a regression from a genital stage to the anal or oral stages of infant sexual development as described by S. Freud (1900: 197–9). Regression is different from fixation at a particular stage of development. Some authors saw regression to a simpler, more primary state – not

Feelings and thoughts and cultural positions regarding climate change can be seen as expressions of internal object relationships. An example is the superego–id relationship that climate alarmists have with the rest of us, urging us to change our ways from the high moral ground (Randall 2005: 9). Another is our willingness to treat nature and the environment in the ruthless way that a baby treats his or her mother (Randall 2005: 7; Ryland 2000: 390).

**Attachment theory**

Attachment theory is based on observing the attachment behaviour of infants. It proposes that people construct internal working models, similar to internal object relationships, which are shaped by their early attachment experiences and which govern their subsequent patterns of relationship behaviour (Bowlby 1988: 129–30).

**Repression and the unconscious**

According to S. Freud (1925b: 14), the ego feels that certain thoughts are dangerous, threatening and unacceptable, so it applies psychic energy to repress them into the unconscious: a repository of the ideas and feelings incompatible with the ego’s values and relationships. Searles (1972) and Segal (1987) noted the unconscious omnipotent destructive fantasies that may underlie how we tolerate the exploitation of nature and the nuclear threat (see below: c. Psychoanalysis and nature).

**Defences and resistance**

The ego represses unacceptable thoughts or ideas to the unconscious, and resists repressed id content from re-emerging into consciousness by means of defences. These can lead to obsessions and phobias. Obsessions try to overcome hate by displacing affect away from the original conflict, reinforcing the affectionate side. Phobias release anxiety but repress the conflict and replace hate, leaving the affectionate impulse.
Anxiety

S. Freud (1917: 410–11) originally thought that anxiety was caused by interference in the release of sexual tension, but later he saw it as the response to a traumatic threat of separation from, or loss of, a loved object and thence to unsatisfied desires and helplessness. When anxiety fails to deal with the problem, repression removes the painful idea from consciousness, but it persists in the unconscious, potentially causing symptoms. Anxiety underlies many of the psychoanalytic concepts outlined below.

Klein (1946: 101, 105) saw psychotic anxiety as the result of the conflict between the death instinct – and its attacks on all that is life-giving – and the capacity for concern for that on which we depend.

Weintrobe (2013: 35, 41–3) described paranoid–schizoid anxiety, based on mental splitting, idealisation and projection, as leading to black-and-white thinking. Depressive anxiety springs from the part of the self that loves reality and is burdened with sadness, guilt and shame, and from anxiety about past damage from paranoid-schizoid impulses. Depressive anxiety is less idealising and splitting, and more loving and concerned. She suggested that paranoid–schizoid anxieties make us feel threatened that we are not special and entitled. Depressive anxieties about climate change spring from the loss of Earth as a dependable support for our lives and the lives of other species, leading to anxiety about our continued sense of self.

Denial

Denial is central to the analysis of thoughts and feelings about climate change. Sigmund Freud’s translators rendered the two different words he used as disavowal and negation. I explore this distinction in more detail in the next section.

Anna Freud (1937) treated denial as one of the mechanisms of defence that she listed. In her father Sigmund Freud’s account of Little Hans’s anxieties, she saw how ‘the child’s ego refuses to become aware of some disagreeable reality … it turns its back on it, denies it and in imagination reverses the unwelcome facts’; so ‘the ego is saved anxiety and has no need to resort to defensive measures against its instinctual impulses’ (A. Freud 1937: 85). She suggested that, for adults and children, anxiety provoked by instinctual processes incompatible with the individual’s circumstances causes denial (85–8). While Anna Freud saw play as denial (89), Winnicott (1974: 59) saw play as a creative process.
According to Klein (1946), hallucinatory gratification makes the splitting of the object and the denial of frustration and persecution possible, which damages the internal object relationship:

> The frustrating and persecuting object is kept widely apart from the idealised object … The denial of psychic reality becomes possible only through the feeling of omnipotence … Omnipotent denial of the existence of the bad object and of the painful situation is in the unconscious equal to annihilation by the destructive impulse. It is … an object-relation which suffers this fate; and therefore a part of the ego, from which the feelings towards the object emanate, is denied and annihilated as well. (Klein 1946: 102; my italics)

Rosenfeld (1983) showed how this splitting process damages both the internal object and the self:

> In the unconscious this process [idealisation of the good object] is equivalent to the annihilation of the whole disturbing object relationship, so that it is clear that it involves the denial not only of the bad object but of an important part of the ego, which is in a relationship with the object. (Rosenfeld 1983: 262)

Klein (1940) described the operation of the manic defence in a woman whose son had unexpectedly died:

> When the loss occurred, the manic position became reinforced, and denial in particular came especially into play. Unconsciously, Mrs. A. strongly rejected the fact that her son had died. When she could no longer carry on this denial so strongly, but was not yet able to face the pain and sorrow, triumph, one of the other elements of the manic position, became reinforced … ‘Now I get my revenge against this unpleasant boy who injured my brother.’ (Klein 1940: 140)

Klein saw denial as a means to escape persecutory feelings and to preserve an idealisation of the object from threat, through a splitting process. Rosenfeld added that this damages not only the object but also the part of the self in relation to it.

Anna Freud’s view of denial as arising from the threat of unacceptable impulses, and Klein’s picture of denial as resulting from paranoid–schizoid splitting processes, are complementary accounts.

**Disavowal and negation**

Freud used the terms Verleugnung (disavowal) (S. Freud 1938: 204) and Verneinung (negation) (S. Freud 1925a: 235–9), though Verleugnung has often been translated as denial. Disavowal and negation both describe the phenomenon of holding two opposite positions at once. They are interrelated in overlapping and ambiguous ways (Erlich 1986: 231–2, 234–5, 330; Freedman and Russell 2003: 72–4; Levy and Inderbitzin 1989: 9). Whereas negation implies simply the splitting of fact from meaning, disavowal suggests a splitting of the personality such that its different parts can
believe opposite things at once. Both Priel (2001) and Penot (1998) suggest that negation allows for symbolisation, but disavowal is a bar to symbolisation.

**Negation**

Negation occurs when the repressed matter becomes conscious, so there is ‘intellectual acceptance of the repressed, while at the same time what is essential to the repression persists’ (S. Freud 1925a: 236). The fact is accepted, but its emotional and psychological implications are denied. Freud saw negation operating in treatment when the patient opposes the analyst’s interpretation. Freud described how this works in the ‘Dora’ case (Freud 1905), in his interpretation of Dora’s dream about her mother’s jewel case and her response:

‘Perhaps you do not know that “jewel-case” [Schmuckkästchen] is a favourite expression for the same thing that you alluded to not long ago by means of the reticule you were wearing—for the female genitals, I mean.’

‘I knew you would say that.’

‘That is to say, you knew that it was so.’

In his footnote, Freud commented that this is a ‘very common way of putting aside a piece of knowledge that emerges from the repressed’. He described his own experience of negation:

I saw something which did not fit in at all with my expectation; yet I did not allow what I saw to disturb my fixed plan in the least, though the perception should have put a stop to it. I was unconscious of any contradiction in this. (Freud 1893: 117 footnote)

Weintrobe proposed that negation can be worked through, so that reality is eventually faced and loss is mourned.

**Disavowal**

Disavowal consists in simultaneously disavowing and acknowledging a fact or circumstance. S. Freud (1938: 202–3) argued that the fetishist sustains an infantile attitude by a splitting of the ego, simultaneously disavowing and acknowledging feminine castration. He related castration anxiety to the combined effect of discovering the anatomical difference between the sexes plus the castration threat by the father. Disavowal is reminiscent of ‘doublethink’ (part of ‘newspeak’) in Orwell’s 1984. While doublethink is enforced by political terrorisation; the superego’s repressive power might be equivalently coercive:

To know and not to know, to be conscious of complete truthfulness while telling carefully-constructed lies, to hold simultaneously two opinions which cancelled out, knowing them to
be contradictory and believing in both of them; to use logic against logic, to repudiate morality while laying claim to it … above all, to apply the same process to the process itself. That was the ultimate subtlety: consciously to induce unconsciousness, and then, once again, to become unconscious of the act of hypnosis you had just performed. Even to understand the word ‘doublethink’ involved the use of doublethink. (Orwell 2013: 40–1)

Weintrobe (2013: 38–40) suggested that disavowal, avoiding paranoid–schizoid and depressive anxieties, is more entrenched than negation. She linked it with feeling entitled to exploit others and with triumph, superiority and arrogance – designed to prevent mourning and sadness – and suggested that it includes an attack on thinking. Disavowal might take place when reality is too obvious to ignore and the self fears it will not survive catastrophic change.

Disavowal of unacceptable ideas and feelings is similar to how the inhabitants of Norgaard’s (2011: see Chapter 3) Norwegian town functioned, when subject to pressures to conform to the social organisation of denial. Social norms prevented them from being aware of and discussing the effects of climate change, which led to ‘double realities’: knowing and not knowing.

Ambivalence

Ambivalence describes consciously holding opposite thoughts or impulses simultaneously; love and hate, towards the same object; a compromise between the repressed ideas and the repressive agency. Unlike disavowal and negation, it is confined to conflicting feelings of love and hate.

Psychoanalysis and climate change

Psychoanalytic writers have only comparatively recently begun to focus on climate change. Engaging with Climate change, edited by Sally Weintrobe (2013), drew together psychoanalytic contributions to thinking about climate change and Vital Signs, edited by Mary-Jayne Rust and Nick Totton (2012), focused on environmental problems from a Jungian perspective.

Greed

Weintrobe (2009) identified greed, linked with arrogance, as causing some of our feelings about global warming, leading to unconcern for the environment. She saw denial as linked with unwillingness to face guilt about damage to the environment. She argued that arrogance and splitting are forms of dissociation and disavowal. Disavowal is for her associated with ‘the exciting cheap solution’. She suggested that groups provide a way of disowning guilt, similar to how ‘interpretive communities’ (see Chapter 3) prevent the thinking or voicing of thoughts that threaten established
values, and promote the unquestioning acceptance of environmental privilege. Theories of social dominance, identity-protective cognition and motivated reasoning can provide social psychological backing for Weintrobe’s view of group processes as enabling the disowning of guilt.

**Splitting and projection**

Randall (2005) identified Freud’s original view of denial as a response to an external traumatic experience, which allows a distressing truth to be assimilated gradually. ‘A temporary split occurs in the ego’ and allows ordinary life to continue. If the experience continues to be unacceptable, ‘the split becomes permanent’ and ‘things which are connected are experienced as having nothing to do with one another’ (Randall 2005: 4).

Freud was clear that [defences of denial, splitting and projection] were the gateway to delusion – that they were an attempt at self-preservation that took an individual to the edge of madness and sometimes beyond. It is likely that the collective form of these defences described here will also have personal consequences. (Randall 2005: 6)

Thus denial is an important defensive strategy to deal with ambiguous and uncertain threats, and the resultant fears and anxieties about the future.

From all of this, it emerges that there are a wide range of psychoanalytic perspectives that can shed light on denial of climate change.

**Psychoanalysis and nature**

Psychoanalytic writers have largely neglected the environment. Searles (1972) appealed to psychoanalysts to respond to the ecological crisis, but his paper has stood alone until quite recently. Even today, for most psychoanalytic psychotherapists, the individual’s relationship with the environment is less important clinically than the interaction between the individual’s internal and social worlds. Searles and Segal suggested that environmental concerns are absent in psychoanalysis because of apathy based upon powerfully repressed and unconscious feelings and attitudes. The world is full of chaotically uncontrollable non-human elements, so we fear being overwhelmed (Searles 1972: 361).

He suggested that at the phallic and oedipal level:

- we communicate about the environment from a moralistic, superego position;
- we defiantly refuse to give up our genital potency symbolised by the car;
we competitively fear oedipal rivals and succeeding generations, so let them suffer our pollution.

At a paranoid level, he suggested that our healthy relatedness to our nonhuman environment has become disrupted, and distorted:

- we find the technology-dominated world alien and overwhelming; so we regress unconsciously to non-differentiation from it;
- we project our ‘nonhuman’ unconscious strivings for omnipotence onto technology’s domination of nature;
- our fantasies of omnipotent destructiveness and identification with forces that threaten to destroy the world can shield us from recognising our own guilt-laden murderous urges to destroy one’s own intrapersonal and interpersonal world;
- Mother earth is equivalent to reality, hindering our yearnings for unfettered omnipotence, so we want to be rid of it. (Searles 1972: 363–72)

Freud’s psychology was grounded in an individual’s bodily experience (S. Freud 1905). He saw instincts as originating from bodily impulses, and the individual’s response to their male or female body as central to their psychological development (168). As sexuality is common to human and other species, the individual is related to the non-human environment as Searles described.

Shipman (2010: 521) argued that developing the capacity to relate to and use domesticated animals was a crucial stage in our evolutionary development. As people nowadays have little contact with the natural world, we have mostly lost this capacity to relate to nature and the animal world, so we can easily ignore our relationship with the environment.

Spitzform (2000) noted that ‘Psychoanalytic developmental theory lacks a framework for understanding the role played by relatedness to the natural world for the emerging human self … this gap is hard to see, like clean air, because we are so immersed in the natural world. It is pervasively present and thus easily overlooked’ (265). Balint’s (1989: see below) metaphor of the ‘harmonious interpenetrating mix-up’ describes this well. Spitzform suggested that early experience should ‘optimize both the protection of the youngster and the youngster’s opportunity to explore in both human and non-human realms’ (2000: 267). Her patient described his weekend hike: “‘I guess I just relax … maybe because I feel I can just belong there, in nature. I don’t have to do anything, to please anyone, to belong’” (278).
Spitzform suggested that adaptations to bodily changes, and our understanding of time and death, are two forms of interaction with the more-than-human. Moral development includes empathy across species, as well as within the human social sphere, and our norms for psychological and emotional health could include our relation to the more-than-human, including place, other species and the universe at large.

Bodnar (2008: 485) argued for incorporating the environment into psychoanalytic thought. She suggested that object relations theory provides a map of the self in place, integrating the body, the self and other, and the mediating environments of home, locality and the world beyond (492). She continued:

The nonhuman environment channels sensory experience into recognizable form. It also contains stimulation that is independent of the person, so that the sense of self can be modulated by knowing one’s place in a larger field. Experience with and memory of the environment creates the boundaries and structure necessary for relational moments to cohere into the form and function of adaptive personality function. (Bodnar 2008: 503)

Bodnar’s (2012) research suggested that early interaction with the physical landscape forms the kind of relationship people have to their ecosystem and who they become (30–1).

Lertzman (2013) interviewed residents of an ecologically troubled region on the edge of the Great Lakes. Industry had brought jobs and prosperity but had damaged ecosystems and was threatening drinking water supplies. She found high levels of concern, sadness, anxiety and loss. People were nostalgic about damage to particular sites, but seemed not to be involved in reparation and cleanup (122). She suggested that apathy can be thought of not as lack of concern, but as an expression of difficult and conflicting feelings. Her participants were describing the importance of the environment for a sense of community and meaning in their own personal lives (130).

Segal (1987), writing about the nuclear threat, maintained that the individual’s destructive and self-destructive drives could only be modified by becoming aware of their consequences to himself and others. Denial of the consequences of nuclear war involved splitting: we retain intellectual knowledge of the danger, but divest it of emotional meaning. This would be a clear case of negation. She represented this as a regression from the depressive position, and the recognition of one’s aggression and feeling guilt and mourning, to a paranoid–schizoid position involving denial, splitting and projection (Segal 1987: 9–10).

Winnicott (1963: 223) represented the good-enough mother as providing a facilitating environment, a metaphorical link with the natural environment, and Balint (1989: 66) described the early relationship
with the mother, beginning in the womb, as a ‘harmonious interpenetrating mix-up’ similar to how, while air is there, we take it for granted – but we cannot live without it.

Randall, and Ryland, like Searles (1972), connected thoughts and feelings about the environment to our internal representations of the mother: Randall (2005) suggested that many thoughts and feelings about environmental problems are like ‘attitudes towards the mother which are aggressively infantile or childlike’ (Randall: 6–8). Ryland (2000) noted our use of archetypes of the earth as mother, for example by Lovelock:

\[\text{Gaia}] \text{ is no doting mother or fragile and delicate damsel in danger from brutal mankind. Rather, Gaia is a stern and tough parent who keeps the world warm and comfortable for those who obey the rules but is ruthless toward transgressors … The Earth Mother … is a central theme in the environmental consciousness … There is the Loving Mother, but there is also the Terrible Mother. The negative side of the Mother archetype may connote anything secret, hidden, dark. (Ryland 2000: 389–93)\]

Randall noted that Freud saw that collective defences are part of the public political and societal discourse, which in return shapes the individual’s willingness to respond.

This survey of psychoanalytic contributions to thinking about climate change and the environment shows that, apart from Searles, there has been little psychoanalytic reference to environmental thinking in the past, but today the individual’s relationship to his environment is an important and developing area.

\textbf{Psychoanalytic views of culture}

The preceding sections consider ways that psychoanalysis can explain individual psychological positions in relation to climate change. This section reviews psychoanalytic views of cultures and how they can operate to deny unwelcome knowledge. Shared cultural positions are akin to the concept of interpretive communities, which I describe in Chapter 3.

Steiner (1985: 164–9) used the story of Oedipus to elaborate the concepts of disavowal and negation, showing how seeing – and not seeing – are related to our early experience. He selected the phrase ‘turning a blind eye’ to convey the ambiguity about whether our knowledge of something is conscious. He described how Sophocles, in \textit{Oedipus Tyranus}, suggests that Oedipus is innocent and also that Oedipus, Jocasta, her brother Creon and the elders have always known about his relationship to Laius and Jocasta, and have all colluded to deny what they know.
If the oedipal crime is not acknowledged, Steiner argued, the individual will fear the truth being exposed, so he cannot achieve the depressive position. Failing to work through his oedipal conflicts, his patient remained in a childish state. He reminded us of what turning a blind eye to the nuclear threat implied. Steiner’s analysis of a cultural unwillingness to consider unwelcome facts can be applied to climate change. Searles (1972) and Segal (1987) also described the denial of environmental problems and of the nuclear threat in oedipal terms, describing on one side, unconscious destructiveness, on the other side, libidinal excited triumph over our assumed mastery over the natural world.

Hoggett (2013: 58–64) saw climate change denial as a societal phenomenon, springing from a perverse social structure, by means of a mental ‘pathological organisation’. In order to escape the reality of loss, part of the mind is deflected towards perverse pleasure and callous indifference to others; perverse thinking, including perverse scepticism and turning a blind eye; and collusion between market forces – values making greed good not bad – and the accomplice consumer’s willingness to be seduced. His emphasis on perversity suggests disavowal, implying a perverse seeing, and not seeing, the absence of the female penis, leading to fetishism.

Weintrobe (2013: 40–4) identified group processes as enabling diminished responsibility by holding a collectivised anxiety about arrogance, greed and guilt, and saw us as having been invaded by an arrogant pathological organisation. She saw the annihilation of all life as our underlying unconscious anxiety. When denial is embedded within cultures, fostered by powerful groups, this denial is internalised to our internal worlds, and our culture appeals to parts of us that disavow problems and arrogantly apply omnipotent fixes to them. This perverse culture therefore discourages objective discussion of global warming and the negative consequences of unlimited economic growth. Steiner’s, Hoggett’s and Weintrobe’s contributions together bring out a theme of perversity about climate change denial.

**Psychological research and psychoanalytic theory**

A comparison of psychological and psychoanalytic theories of thoughts and feelings about climate change suggests that they both investigate the same basic phenomena. The psychoanalytic principle of dynamic psychological conflict explains our disavowal and negation – and splitting and projection – which is relevant to the denial of climate change. However, a social psychological view can enhance a psychoanalytic approach. Psychological surveys of thoughts and feelings about climate change found that anxiety was widespread. Freud saw anxiety as a central factor underlying many psychological problems, and Weintrobe explained anxiety about climate change as based on both paranoid–schizoid and depressive functioning.
The psychoanalytic concept of ambivalence (the product of a conflict between the repressive agency – or superego – and repressed desires, leading to guilt) can help to explain uncertainty and confusion about climate science. The paranoid–schizoid processes of splitting and projection can help to understand the findings that people deny climate change because it is remote, and that they are willing to project responsibility onto others, interpret the facts selectively, or distrust and doubt the facts. Regression to more childlike states of mind could explain the tendency to become helpless in the face of the difficulties of thinking constructively about climate change. The theory of learned helplessness perhaps provides an alternative to this view. The finding of despair can well be explained by the triumph of the death instinct.

Theories of social dominance, identity-protective cognition and motivated reasoning add a social meaning to a psychoanalytic explanation of climate change denial as greed. Steiner, Hoggett and Weintrobe all represent the operation of psychoanalytic processes in the social world, which bear a close resemblance to the operation of interpretive communities, which I describe in Chapter 3.

Psychological, social psychological and psychoanalytic theories and findings combine to provide a rich and suggestive texture of alternative understandings of peoples’ thoughts and feelings about climate change.
Chapter 3: Perspectives from Social Science

Introduction

In Chapter 2, I considered psychological and psychoanalytic perspectives on feelings and views about climate change. In this chapter I examine the sociological and cultural perspectives which I apply to my interview data in Chapters 5 to 8, and draw together theories from different schools of social thought that can illuminate thoughts and feelings about climate change. I begin with some theories of society based in psychoanalytic thought. Marris in particular makes an explicit link between psychoanalytic and sociological thinking. I summarise the work of Cohen and Zerubavel, who have both analysed denial sociologically. I then outline sociological theories of social norms, interpretive communities and catastrophe. I go on to consider cultural theorists and similarities between the interpretive communities they describe and those of VBN (values–beliefs–norms) theorists Dryzek, Haidt and Schwartz. Overt ecological thinking scarcely emerges in my interview data but, as it is essential in making sense of the crisis of climate change, I then deal with the significance of ecology and of place.

Psychoanalysis, culture and society

This section outlines ways that psychoanalytic thinking has been applied to analyses of crises in the wider society. Trauma is central to Freud’s thought (S. Freud 1893: 4–6) and has affinities with the interruptions in what Winnicott describes as ‘going on being’ that lead to loss of meaning (Winnicott 1962: 60–1). The concept of trauma as a societal response to sudden and unmanageable changes links the work of Marris, Joffe and Wasdell, and connects with the ideas of Randall, Steiner, Hoggett and Weintrobe, described in Chapter 2.

Marris (1974: 5–22) invoked the principle of ‘conservatism’ as a way of understanding social and psychological experiences. A familiar construction of reality enables learning from experience and adaptability, allowing for mastering something new. The meaning we attach to people and events from our earliest years develops into a stable way of interpreting events, but when we cannot assimilate new experiences into our pre-existing way of interpreting the world, we have to adapt; this involves loss and change, potentially leading to growth, or possibly loss: a crisis of discontinuity, like
bereavement. These experiences provoke anxieties of loss, ideological bewilderment and confusions over meaning.

Marris (1982: 191–4) proposed the metaphor of ‘structures of meaning’, similar to the internal working models of attachment theory. Children classify and compare experience and generate meanings. We share these structures of meaning with other people, and they are inextricable from our relationships. This train of thought closely resembles Bodnar’s view that ‘Culture is the accumulation of small group processes and shared symbolic systems transported over geographic space’ (Bodnar 2008: 497).

Marris (1991: 77) offered attachment theory as a bridge between psychology and social science, suggesting that:

> Whether we tend to see order as natural and secure, something to learn about and respond to, or as the fragile imposition of human will on chaos and destructive impulses will be determined, I believe, largely by our childhood experience of attachment. And that experience will be influenced in turn by the child-rearing practices of the culture. (Marris 1991: 79)

Joffe (1996: 198) suggested that a Kleinian approach can illuminate how historical trends are applied to people’s current social representations of new perceived dangers. AIDS was represented as the ‘gay plague’, to make the social world seem more manageable. Joffe argued that the theory of infantile splitting and projection – where the ‘good’ self is protected from the ‘bad’ other – can illuminate processes of representation (204–5). These social representations use splits as a bond with others to escape isolation, in order to deal with threats and dangers beyond one’s control (210).

Wasdell (2011: 7–8) applied theories of individual psychoanalytic functioning to societal operation, and suggested that:

> when the intensity of anxiety (about climate change) passes a threshold of tolerance it begins to lose its functionality … polarisation sets in … between in-group and out-group, between us and them, between goodies and baddies, between friends and enemies … A culture of blame intensifies, often projected into convenient scapegoats … the paranoid–schizoid state is particularly intense under conditions of high stress, diminishing resource and rapid change. Reality-testing is rejected in favour of maintenance and reinforcement of the social defences against anxiety.

As regards the environmental crisis, he argued that:

> Regression to the idealised pre-natal state with denial of the information that it is inherently non-sustainable, dominates … In our collective psychotic fantasy, mother-earth has infinite resources, can support an unlimited population and is able to absorb all our pollution, world without end … This collective pre-Traumatic-stress disorder transforms the hope of birth into
the terror of annihilation, blocking our capacity to envisage life beyond the transition. (Wasdell 2011: 9)

Marris proposed attachment theory as a bridge between psychoanalysis and sociology; Joffe described a psychoanalytic theory of culture that links with cultural theories described later in this chapter; Wasdell applied an individual psychoanalytic approach to the functioning of society. All three show how psychoanalytic ideas could be applied to climate change.

Denial

I begin by outlining the sociology of denial (Cohen 2001; Zerubavel 2006), which has not so far been applied to climate change. I then consider sociological perspectives on climate change denial, particularly Norgaard’s (2011) analysis of ‘selective interpretation’, ‘double realities’, and ‘environmental privilege’, and the related ‘interpretive communities’.

The sociology of denial

Cohen’s (2001) States of Denial analysed how parts of South African society could ignore widespread institutionalised human rights violation under apartheid. He divided denial into:

literal denial, where the fact or knowledge of facts is denied;

interpretive denial, where facts are interpreted differently from the meaning that others give them; and

implicatory denial, where facts are recognized, but with no moral or political imperative to act on them. (Cohen 2001: 7–9)

Examples of interpretive denial are:

denial of responsibility;

denial of injury;

denial of the victim;

condemnation of their condemner; and

the appeal to group loyalty. (Cohen 2001: 58–64)

He applied Sykes’ and Matza’s analysis of the ‘accounts’ delinquents use to neutralise the moral force of the law, distinguishing ‘accounts’ – culturally acceptable explanations of actions learned through
cultural transmission – from unconscious defence mechanisms, rationalisations or disavowal, as described psychoanalytically.

He then considered different levels of denial. Personal denial is internal, within the individual. Official denial occurs when states and organisations deny facts, as part of the structure of the state. Cultural denial is an unwritten agreement about what can and cannot be thought about and spoken about (Cohen 2001: 10–11). This is what theories of interpretive communities describe (see below, c. Interpretive communities). He then divided participants in atrocities into victims, perpetrators and bystanders. The bystander is equivocal, he or she is not immediately implicated, but by their inaction they are collusive (140–167). Cohen provided a clear and comprehensive sociological analysis of denial.

Zerubavel (2006) saw everyday denial as cultural. He described how children learn from adults what to ignore as ‘irrelevant’, what are taboos, what cannot be named, euphemisms, tact, politely avoiding the obvious, and political correctness (Zerubavel 2006: 20–1). He showed how denial is socially structured and how silence around a subject involves both speaker and listener (47–8): for instance, the US Army’s earlier approach, ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’, regarding homosexuality. He developed Cohen’s analysis of the bystander position: denial is increased by social proximity, or by a larger community of deniers. The silent bystander implicitly accepts the denial, and silence-breakers are sanctioned by being discredited or ridiculed (72). Zerubavel described many of the unspoken, sometimes unconscious, processes that psycho-social analysis (described in Chapter 4) focuses on.

Cohen’s (2001) analysis – particularly of forms of interpretive denial – is applicable to climate change denial. He showed how the roles of perpetrator, victim and bystander are interrelated. We are perpetrators, in benefitting from fossil fuel products; people in more vulnerable environments are more victims than we are, but are also bystander witnesses. Zerubavel’s (2006) elaboration of the interactive two-person nature of silences, the complicity of the silent bystander, and the sanctions applied to silence-breakers enhances Cohen’s account and enriches the analysis of ‘selective interpretation’ and double realities that Norgaard (2011) described.

Social norms: Norgaard

Norgaard’s (2011) research into thoughts and feelings about climate change in a small Norwegian town community was based on in-depth interviews, media analysis and participant observation (Norgaard 2011: 234). This revealed how emotions, identity, and cultures of talk governed the way that people created their everyday life and their perceptions and response to climate change. She used
her own emotional responses as data (238), in common with psycho-social methodology, as I describe in Chapter 4, which I illustrate by my own use of my emotional responses to data.

Though her participants’ responses could be seen as individual, she ascribed the pressures to conform to social norms preventing discussion of climate change to ‘double realities’ – knowing and not knowing – achieved through the social organisation of denial (4, 211–15). She related this to ‘cognitive dissonance’, fostered by guilt and the threat to identity and self-esteem that awareness of climate change presents (85–95). This is reminiscent of psychoanalytic theories of denial and of Orwell’s (2013) ‘doublethink’ (see Chapter 2 above).

She showed how cultural practices sustain social structure and prescribe which emotions are legitimate (Norgaard 2011: 92–5) through the subtle exercise of power (132–5). People submitted to pressures to conform in order to avoid being treated as outsiders. They joked, controlled their exposure to information, and turned their attention away (132–5). They avoided unpleasant emotions regarding climate change by ignoring them (91–5), representing themselves positively (87–9) and framing disturbing facts to make them less potent (141–3, 180–2). These are examples of negation and what Cohen described as implicatory denial.

Norgaard’s participants drew on cultural myths about being Norwegian in order to deny Norway’s contribution to climate change – Norway is a ‘little land’, whose people deserve a good life because they have suffered – comparing Norway favourably with ‘Amerika’ (Norgaard 2011: 161–75). They thought of themselves as simple, close to nature, egalitarian, humanitarian (140) and claimed virtue through distorted logic: for example, that gas-fired are better than coal-fired power stations, so increasing gas production will help the climate (171–2). She described ‘environmental privilege’, whereby taken-for-granted structures and practices give disproportionate access to resources (216–22). This is similar to class privilege – invisible, ‘normal’ and assumed – and parallels Weintrobe’s (2013) description of disavowal, the entitlement to exploit others.

The overlap between social and psychological explanations is illustrated by the parallels between the concept of conformity to social norms and the collusive collective ‘knowing and not knowing’ about Oedipus’s actions that Steiner described, which I report in Chapter 2.

Interpretive communities

Norgaard’s description of social norms links to research on interpretive communities, the psychological and social area where individual and cultural attitudes overlap. Lorenzoni, Nicholson-Cole and Whitmarsh (2007) defined interpretive communities, as regards climate change, in this way:
Another form of constraint explicitly identified by many participants was social norms and expectations requiring carbon-dependent lifestyles. Socially-acceptable ways of behaving—for example, driving to work, frequent long-haul holidays and weekend breaks, leaving appliances on and the weekly supermarket shop—in turn become ingrained as unconscious habitual behaviours, making them unquestioned and thus more intractable. (Lorenzoni, Nicholson-Cole and Whitmarsh 2007: 453)

This is evidently similar to Cohen’s ‘cultural denial’. Many researchers have found that research participants belonged to and were influenced by the interpretive or cultural communities to which they belong (Lorenzoni, Nicholson-Cole and Whitmarsh 2007; Norgaard 2011; Crompton 2010; Nilsson, von Borgstede and Biel 2004; Leiserowitz 2003, 2005, 2006; O’Riordan and Jordan 1999; Pendergraft 1998; M. Thompson 2003; P. Stern et al. 1999; Heath and Gifford 2006; Vlek 2000).

**Catastrophe theory**

Interview data reveal widespread fears that global warming may lead to catastrophic climate change, which Peter Cook satirised, as I describe in Chapter 1. Henry (2000) found that those who are not sceptical about global warming anticipate that its effects will be sudden and catastrophic—a ‘doomsday’ phenomenon—rather than subtle and gradual, and foresee dramatic events as more probable than equally frequent but less dramatic ones (Henry: 27–8). Even so, Weber (2006: 113–14) found that only the potentially catastrophic nature of climate change and its effects on future generations produced a visceral reaction. Having personal experience of global warming and its potentially devastating consequences can be extremely effective, but may arrive too late. However, Feinberg and Willer (2011: 35) argued that dire warnings about global warming may be counter-productive, clashing with a need to believe that the world is just, stable and orderly. Zerubavel suggested that social proximity increased denial (see above, a. The sociology of denial).

Cohn (1970) traced the history of millenarianism through the Middle Ages from the early Crusades, through the period of the Peasants’ Revolt to the pre-Reformation millenarian movements in the church. He located it in areas becoming seriously over-populated and involved in rapid social and economic change (Cohn 1970: 53). The fear of catastrophic climate change overlaps with an ecological perspective on population expansion (see Catton below, in 5. Ecology, mind, society and environment a. Ecology).

Together, the theories outlined in this section have made a persuasive case for seeing the strong social component in the operation of denial, both generally and as regards climate change.
Cultural theory

This section introduces cultural theory, which I have dealt with separately from the section above concerned with interpretive communities. Cultural theory provides a structured analysis of diverse and dynamically opposed cultural positions or interpretive communities within a society. It has been used extensively in quantitative research into thoughts and feelings about climate change, including work that seeks to promote understanding climate culture wars from a ‘climate concern’ perspective.

Cultural theory, like psychoanalysis, examines various value-loaded thoughts and feelings about relationships with others and the world, describing them value-neutrally. From a climate concern position, it is tempting to conclude that an egalitarian position is preferable to an individualist or a hierarchical one.

Values–beliefs–norms theory (P. Stern et al. 1999), Schwartz’s self-transcendence or self-enhancement (Schwartz and Bardi 2001: 21–4; Schwartz and Boehnke 2004: 231–3; Schwartz n.d.) and Dryzek’s (1997) environmental discourses, have similarities to cultural theory and have all been applied to climate change, with similar findings (see below). Haidt’s (2013) moral psychology, not so far applied to thoughts and feelings about climate change, has parallels with and in certain ways enhances cultural theory.

The development of cultural theory

Drawing upon the cultural theory of Douglas and Wildavsky (1982), Thompson, Ellis and Wildavsky (1990) developed a ‘grid-group’ analysis which divided cultures into four ‘ways of life’, based on how far the individual is bound by social units (the ‘group’ aspect) or by hierarchical rules (the ‘grid’ aspect). These ways of life form the interpretive communities referred to earlier:

**Individualist**: weak group incorporation and prescribed behaviour and roles

**Egalitarian**: strong group boundaries but weak social rules

**Fatalist**: strong external controls but excluded from group membership

**Hierarchist**: strong group boundaries and rules (Thompson, Ellis and Wildavsky 1990: 8–9, 93–4)

The grid-group format defines human interaction in terms of four ‘ways of life’, or cultural positions (see Figure 2 below). They suggested that the individual’s identifications with various social settings and processes shape his or her subjectivity through their social relationships (Thompson, Ellis and
Wildavsky 1990: 2), particularly those that reflect (bureaucratic) hierarchist, (market based) individualistic, and (communitarian) egalitarian positions (6–7).

**Figure 2:** Thompson, Ellis and Wildavsky’s ‘Ways of life’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>b. Weak group</th>
<th>c. Strong Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>d. Weak Grid</td>
<td>e. Individualist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. Strong Grid</td>
<td>h. Fatalist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>i. Hierarchist</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cultural theory treats interests as springing from conscious and unconscious calculations, part of people’s particular groupings. Patterns of solidarity constrain what they do and how they interpret the world, so individuals adjust their behaviour to suit the prevailing institutional context (Thompson, Ellis and Wildavsky 1990: 91). This resembles the way that ‘interpretive communities’ operate, as described above.

O’Riordan and Jordan (1999) argued that the market, hierarchy, and community triple structure can provide an analysis of the roles of institutions in climate change politics. ‘Community’ is their way of describing the egalitarian position (O’Riordan and Jordan 1999: 86–92). Cotgrove (1982: 25–35) saw those who viewed nature as robust and overflowing with resources as ‘Cornucopians’, and identified environmentalists who saw nature as fragile and vulnerable as ‘Catastrophists’. Catastrophists and cornucopians had conflicting views of nature and opposed moral judgments on social relations, science and technology. Industrialists, who tend to be cornucopians, saw wealth creation as a moral imperative within a free market where enterprise and risk are rewarded. Catastrophists prioritised non-material values, social relationships, community and participation in decisions. O’Riordan and Jordan thus maintain that each party to the struggle over climate change draws on its own moral certainties. This reflects Haidt’s (2013) perception that differing psychological and social positions each have their own moral foundation (see below, d. Cultural theory and other theories of values iii. Haidt).

Thompson and Rayner (1998b) maintained that defining the climate change problem in one way only diminishes resilience and institutional plurality, and that understanding the heterogeneous climate change discourse (expert and lay) requires us to tolerate different coexisting conceptions of natural vulnerability and societal fairness. They argued that a non-judgmental approach makes it possible to sort out the various perceptions (Thompson and Rayner 1998b: 143–4, 165). Different views of nature lead some people to denounce behaviour that others see as reasonable.
M. Thompson (2003) claimed that cultural theory captures some myths concerning nature (see Appendix III: Myths of Nature). For individualists, nature is benign and resilient; for egalitarians, nature is fragile, intricately interconnected and ephemeral; for hierarchists, nature is stable until pushed beyond limits, and man is flawed but redeemable by trustworthy institutions; fatalists see nature as unpredictable, and man as untrustworthy, so to say ‘why bother?’ is rational (M. Thompson 2003: 5107–5109).

Jordan and O’Riordan (1997) described how the four ‘ways of life’ or ‘myths of human nature’ interact with one another to drive social change, according to their relative dominance at any time. They maintained that:

Dominant institutional patterns of culture, politics and law generally serve to maintain climate change, and to shape response in a manner that is supportive of the very structures that create climate change … Unless there is a universal shift on all fronts, none of this will substantially alter until dominant interests are seriously threatened by the reality of global warming. (Jordan and O’Riordan 1997: 3)

They proposed that individuals move between different assumptive worlds during a day, but are drawn to one of the main categories when the pressure is on. Cultural theory argues that people justify themselves based on their view of nature and society (Jordan and O’Riordan 1997: 33).

Cultural theory and climate change research

Cultural theory has been productively applied in quantitative research to explore thoughts and feelings about climate change and the environment. Pendergraft (1998: 660) found that individualistic and hierarchic assumptions associated with resistance to action on climate change seemed to combine in opposition to egalitarian positions associated with concern about climate change. Grendstad (2000: 237) showed that egalitarianism in Norway was associated with environmentalism, and fatalism predicted distrust of institutions.

Leiserowitz’s (2005: 1439–40) research revealed an interpretive community of predominantly white, Republican and politically conservative men that perceived the danger from climate change as low: they were individualist, hierarchist and anti-egalitarian, expressed anti-environmental attitudes, and distrusted institutions. A contrasting interpretive community had high-risk perceptions of climate change: ‘alarmists’ were egalitarian, anti-individualist, anti-hierarchist and politically liberal and supported government attempts to mitigate climate change (including raising taxes) and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Leiserowitz (2006: 63) found that support for national and international climate policies was strongly associated with pro-egalitarian values, while opposition was associated with anti-egalitarian, pro-individualist and pro-hierarchist values.
Cultural theory: an analytic tool

Cultural theory does not explain how stable an individual’s position is or what leads him or her to adopt or change a position, but for O’Riordan and Jordan (1999), Verweij et al. (2006) and Kahan et al. (2007) this did not undermine its analytic usefulness (combined with other analyses) in providing a framework within which to understand differing and contradictory attitudes towards climate change. O’Riordan and Jordan (1999: 88) suggested that cultural theory throws light on the contradictory ways we engage with global warming, given each individual’s particular mix of differing values and beliefs. Hulme (2009: 357) saw cultural theory as a way to understand diverse views of risk, dependent on how individuals see themselves in relation to society, their worldview, values and ways of life, founded on different views of nature. Verweij et al. (2006: 836–41) proposed a constructive but discordant and democratic dialogue1: a ‘Clumsy Solution’ to cultural theory’s divergent or opposed values. Kahan (2010: 36–7) claimed that people’s grasp of scientific debates can improve if communicators frame their messages to address people’s cultural values. Kahan et al. (2007: 492–3, 498) associated hierarchical and individualistic white males with risk scepticism when their cultural identities are challenged.

Cultural theorists claim that the theory can be applied to clarify the individual and social dynamics of the mixture of thoughts and feelings about climate change. They conclude that individualists and hierarchists are less concerned about the risks of climate change than egalitarians, and that seeing the individual as a mix of variable – and potentially developing and changing – positions helps us communicate with different interpretive communities.

Hetherington and Suhay (2011), in relation to the 9/11 attacks, found that participants who scored high in authoritarianism did not become more hawkish or less supportive of civil liberties in response to the perceived threat from terrorism, but tended to have such preferences even in the absence of threat. However, those who were less authoritarian adopted more restrictive and aggressive policy stands when they perceived a threat from terrorism. This responsiveness to changed circumstances might support how cultural theory describes similar shifts in position when circumstances change.

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1 Clumsy institutions include all of the hierarchical ‘wise guidance and careful stewardship’, the individualistic ‘entrepreneurship and technological progress’, the egalitarian ‘a whole new relationship with nature’, and the fatalist’s ‘why bother?’
Cultural theory and other theories of values

Authors from differing perspectives have arrived at similar ways of thinking about different ‘ways of life’, which provide support for each other and suggest that they share some basically accurate insights.

i. ‘Values–beliefs–norms’ (VBN)

Values–beliefs–norms (VBN) (P. Stern et al. 1999) theory is akin to cultural theory, focusing on environmentally friendly behaviour. P. Stern et al. (1999: 91–2) compared a VBN theory of movement support to six other theories of environmental behaviour, using two value bases, altruism and self-interest, that correspond to self-transcendent and self-enhancement values (see iv. Schwartz below). They found that VBN theory predicted public support for environmentally friendly behaviour better than other analyses, although individualists are less likely to support the environmental movement. Nilsson, von Borgstede and Biel (2004: 274–6) found that respondents in the private sector rated self-enhancement values higher than public sector respondents – while the opposite was true for self-transcendent values – and that those with self-transcendent values broadly accepted climate change policies, while those with self-enhancement values correspondingly supported them less.

ii. Dryzek

Dryzek (1997) identified various environmental discourses. Survivalism, deriving from Malthus and Garret Hardin and the idea of limited resources, argued for the need to work with the limits of ecosystems (Dryzek 1997: 23–6). Prometheanism (or cornucopianism) is based on the idea of unlimited natural resources and capacities to absorb waste, and unrestricted economic growth, disregarding the environment (46–8). Dryzek elaborated these with discourses of administrative rationalism (‘leave it to the experts’) (63–4), democratic pragmatism (‘leave it to the people’) (84–5), and economic rationalism (‘leave it to the market’) (102–3).

iii. Haidt

Haidt (2013) argued, similarly to psychoanalytic writers, that unconscious processes control the conscious reasoning mind and govern behaviour: he used the metaphor of ‘the elephant and its rider’ (Haidt 2013: 52–6), seeing intuition as essentially in charge. McGilchrist (2009) applied a similar metaphor of ‘the master and his emissary’ but came to the opposite conclusion, seeing the ‘left (rational) brain hemisphere’, to do with pieces of information in isolation, as dominant over the ‘right (intuitive) brain hemisphere’, concerned with holistic entities and processes (McGilchrist 2009: 4).
Haidt combined moral and psychological theory – tested in wide-ranging psychological surveys – to explain the diverse moralities across and within societies and cultures. He emphasised the ethical and moral basis underlying the six spectrums and polarities of values that he identified:

**Care/harm**, ranging from universal concerns for humans and non-human species, through to local or tribal concerns.

**Fairness/cheating**, including concern for social justice through to everyday ‘give-and-take’, and thence to just rewards for hard work.

**Loyalty/betrayal**, about commitment to nationalities, tribes and groups.

**Authority/subversion**: concerning degrees of respect for authority.

**Sanctity/degradation**: about fundamental and unshakeable beliefs or disgust.

**Liberty/oppression**: about resistance to domination, and threats to individual liberty. (Haidt 2013: 153–79, 197-211)

Haidt (2013) brought out the association between right-wing politics and denial of man-made climate change. His broader analysis concluded that:

altruism is mainly aimed at members of our own group (220–6);

religions bind groups and create communities with shared morality (317–18);

people bind themselves in teams sharing moral narratives, blinding them to alternative moral worlds (283–4).

Haidt’s spectrum of sanctity/degradation, which ranges from core values like religious values to matters of disgust (2013: 170–7), may underlie more superficial factors governing thoughts and feelings about climate change. His moral psychological positions overlap with the values expressed in cultural theory, and he too seems to identify different interpretive communities.

**iv. Schwartz**

Schwartz formulated a unifying theory for human motivation, based on quantitative surveys of individual differences in values, attitudes and behaviour, across different cultures (Schwartz and Bardi 2001: 21–4; Schwartz and Boehnke 2004: 231–3; Schwartz n.d.). He proposed polar oppositions of self-transcendence against self-enhancement, and conservation against openness to change. Figure 3 below expresses how values near to each other in the diagram are in harmony with other aspects of
people’s personalities (Schwartz n.d.). Those opposite are contrary to other personality features, forming a ten-fold scheme of values:

*Self-direction.* Independent thought and action.

*Stimulation.* Excitement, novelty, and challenge.

*Hedonism.* Pleasure and sensuous gratification.

*Achievement.* Personal success according to social standards.

*Power.* Social status and prestige, control or dominance.

*Security.* Safety, harmony, and stability.

*Conformity.* Restraint of actions, inclinations, and impulses likely to violate social norms.

*Tradition.* Respect, commitment, and acceptance of culture or religion.

*Benevolence.* Preserving welfare of those in frequent contact (the ‘in-group’).

*Universalism.* Understanding and protection for all people and for nature.

**Figure 3:** Model of relations between motivational values (reproduced with author’s permission)
Schwarz (2006: 140–2) also proposed a simpler analysis of a set of social issues. The first societal set of issues is, how far are people autonomous or embedded in their groups? Intellectual autonomy encourages individuals to pursue their own ideas; affective autonomy encourages individuals to pursue positive experience. In cultures that emphasise embeddedness, meaning comes through social relationships and identifying with the group. The second set of issues is how far people consider the welfare of others and manage their interdependencies. Cultural egalitarianism sees people as moral equals sharing basic interests. Cultural hierarchy relies on hierarchies ensuring responsible behaviour and legitimises unequal distribution of power and resources. The third issue concerns how people relate to the natural and social world. The concept of harmony emphasises appreciating and fitting into the world as it is, and values unity with nature and protecting the environment. Mastery encourages mastery of the natural world.

Clearly, Schwartz’s two analyses outlined above are also similar to cultural theory. Self-enhancement has widely been interpreted as in line with individualist values, self-transcendence as similar to egalitarianism, autonomy has parallels with individualism, and egalitarianism is naturally similar to the egalitarianism of cultural theory. As regards people’s thoughts and feelings about the natural world, harmony has parallels with egalitarianism and mastery with individualism.

v. Comparing theories of values

I propose that the above theories have much in common with and support each other. Dryzek’s survivalism and cultural theory’s egalitarianism are similar, and his cornucopianism resembles cultural theory’s individualism. His administrative rationalism is close to cultural theory’s hierarchical position, his democratic pragmatism is like cultural theory’s egalitarianism, and his economic rationalism is like individualism.

Cultural theory and VBN theories are closely related to and consistent with each other. Individualists are by implication supporters of free-market solutions, egalitarians supporters of social justice.

I have shown above similarities between Schwartz’s self-enhancement and self-transcendence, autonomy, egalitarianism, security, conformity and tradition, and cultural theory; harmony is close to egalitarianism and mastery to individualism.

Haidt’s care/harm foundation corresponds to cultural theory’s egalitarianism. His loyalty/betrayal and authority/subversion foundation is similar to cultural theory’s hierarchical values. His liberty/oppression foundation relates both to individualism and egalitarianism, as does fairness/cheating. His sanctity/degradation foundation – though not part of cultural theory or
Schwartz’s or Dryzek’s theories – could explain how some beliefs are underlying, unalterable and unquestionable.

Arguably, though coming from diverse academic perspectives, they are all reducible to the same common-sense ways of analysing various cultural positions around which other values are organised; basically: concern for others; respect for authority and tradition; and self-interest.

I have set out a table of comparisons between them in Figure 4 below.
**Figure 4: Comparative analysis of theories of values**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CT</th>
<th>VBN</th>
<th>Haidt</th>
<th>Dryzek</th>
<th>Schwartz</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Egalitarian:</strong> strong group boundaries, weak social prescriptions</td>
<td>Altruisms</td>
<td>Care/Harm: everyone cares, but liberals care more</td>
<td>Survivalism</td>
<td>Self-transcendence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature is ephemeral: the natural environment is precarious</td>
<td>Liberty/Oppression: liberals care about vulnerable groups, conservatives stress the right to be left alone</td>
<td>Green Romanticism</td>
<td>Openness to change</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sanctity/Degradation</td>
<td>Green Rationalism</td>
<td>Self-Direction: independent thought and action</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fairness/Cheating: everybody cares about this</td>
<td>Democratic Pragmatism: leave it to the people</td>
<td>Security: safety, harmony, and stability</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hierarchical:</strong> strong group boundaries, strong prescriptions: ‘structure produces harmony’</td>
<td>Authority/Subversion</td>
<td>Administrat-ive Rationalism: leave it to the experts</td>
<td>Benevolence: welfare of those with whom one is in frequent personal contact (the ‘in-group’)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature is perverse and tolerant: management can limit any disorder and maintain equilibrium. Main goals: Certainty and predictability</td>
<td>Sanctity/Degradation</td>
<td></td>
<td>Universalism: protection for the welfare of all people and for nature</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Individualistic:</strong> weak group incorporation, weak prescribed behaviour and roles</td>
<td>Self-interest</td>
<td>Liberty/Oppression: liberals care about vulnerable groups, conservatives stress the right to be left alone</td>
<td>Self-enhancement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature is benign: the natural environment is favourable to mankind</td>
<td></td>
<td>Fairness/Cheating (proportionality): everybody cares about this, but conservatives care more</td>
<td>Openness to change</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Loyalty/Betrayal</td>
<td>Self-Direction: independent thought and action</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sanctity/Degradation</td>
<td>Stimulation: excitement, novelty</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fatalistic:</strong> binding external controls, excluded from group membership</td>
<td>Self-capability</td>
<td>Promethean-ism</td>
<td>Hedonism: pleasure and sensuous gratification</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature capricious</td>
<td></td>
<td>Economic Rationalism: leave it to the market</td>
<td>Achievement: personal success</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Power: social status and prestige, control or dominance</td>
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Ecology, mind, society and environment

In this section I make a case for the necessity of an ecological understanding in order to fully appreciate the implications of climate change. The internal world, the social world and the natural world are commonly thought of as distinct, and my participants’ interviews confirm a widespread resistance to recognising that they are interconnected and overlapping. Ecological theories help to make sense of the feelings and views of participants towards their inner worlds, society and nature, and how they relate to each other.

Ecology

Odum’s (1983) theory of ecology helps to understand the environment and the relationships between its parts. He implicitly made parallels between social and natural ecological systems:

Ecology … has emerged from biology as an essentially new, integrative discipline that links physical and biological processes and forms a bridge between the natural sciences and the social sciences. (Odum 1983: 4)

In ecology, the term population, originally coined to denote a group of people, is broadened to include groups of individuals of any one kind of organism. Likewise, community, in the ecological sense (sometimes designated as ‘biotic community’), includes all the populations occupying a given area. The community and the nonliving environment function together as an ecological system or ecosystem.’ (Odum 1983: 4: Author’s emphasis)

‘Ecosystem’ and ‘ecological balance’ describe the interrelationship between different species and thence between different bio-systems. As an example, when foxes catch and kill rabbits, the fox population increases; but if they kill most of the rabbits, they will have destroyed what supports them and the fox population will decline, which will allow the rabbit population to recover and enable the foxes to multiply again. One extremely successful species, namely humanity, is now arguably ecologically unbalanced, since global human population multiplied three and a half times, at an increasing rate, from two billion in 1922, to seven billion in 2010, and is likely to continue until the mid-twenty-first century. Accounts of ecology, ecological systems and the environment often ignore human ecological imbalance, though Odum noted it:

One thing is certain: people, like deer, seem to ‘track’ maximum … capacity levels; our population tends to increase right up to and even beyond one limit after another (food and fossil fuels being the limits of concern at the moment). (Odum 1983: 163)

Catton (1980) defined ‘carrying capacity’ as the maximum persistently feasible load for a species within a particular environment (Catton 1980: 4). He showed that humans have expanded the carrying capacity of their environment, first by developing tools and technologies like compasses, telescopes and firearms. Then Europeans expanded into territories with smaller populations and carrying
capacity: treating indigenous peoples as ‘savage’ allowed Europeans to displace them and expand the carrying capacity of the new territories and lands, particularly the Americas (22–32), enabling global population to double between 1650 and 1850. The next expansion of carrying capacity was by means of exploiting the energy in coal and oil laid down millions of years ago (135–6). Industrialisation has relied on these energy sources which can only temporarily expand carrying capacity for humanity, but they have led to the belief that the environment’s carrying capacity can expand infinitely (236–41).

Urbanisation, a loss of contact with the natural world and increasing dependence on technology (Catton 1980: 205–6), have accompanied massive population growth, which can give a false sense of immunity from the threats of the natural world. This is confirmed by the data from many of my participants which shows little connection with the natural world.

Shubin (2014) showed how we are integrally part of the inanimate world:

The molecules that compose our bodies arose in stellar events in the distant origin of the solar system. Changes to Earth’s atmosphere sculpted our cells and entire metabolic machinery. (Shubin 2014: 14)

Single-cell organisms developed three billion years ago. Two billion years later, algae transformed sunlight into oxygen by photosynthesis, which made oxygen possible:

The interplay between living things and their planet led to increasing levels of oxygen in the atmosphere. Oxygen, in turn, changed the world by allowing for the origin of big creatures with many cells. Life changes earth, earth changes life, and those of us walking the planet today carry the consequences within. (Shubin 2014: 97)

He suggested that human creativity, biological evolution and the environment have worked together:

Human creativity and biology are like different instruments in an orchestra: they play separately, but together they make one score. The advent of cooking is written inside our guts and in the genes that form them. The origin of agriculture is reflected in the structure of our DNA. Our technological and cultural inventions impact our biological selves. But our biology—so defined by big brains, dexterous hands, and speaking organs—makes these inventions possible in the first place. Biology and culture have been the yin and yang of the human experience on our planet. (Shubin 2014: 187)

Thus our bodies as well as our cultures are integral to the ecosystem within which we live. We have played a crucial part in shaping it over thousands of years, particularly since the end of the last ‘ice age’. If culture is integral to our history and development, this suggests the importance of a cultural analysis like cultural theory.
Kump, Kasting and Crane (1999) showed how the earth’s surface processes regulate climate, ocean circulation, atmosphere and the recycling of the elements. The greenhouse effect is essential to the earth’s climate system (Kump, Kasting and Crane 1999: 34–54). The atmosphere, the oceans, and the earth’s crust are interconnected, causing heat, moisture and materials to be distributed and recycled, controlling global bio-geo-chemical cycles (56–119). They traced how the climate system has evolved over billions of years, influenced by the sun’s increasing luminosity, volcanic activity, continental drift, and the throwing up of mountains (152–72).

Capra (1996) applied systems theory to ecology. As systems develop and become more complex, properties emerge that do not exist at less complex levels (Capra 1996: 37). Living organisms are ‘open’ systems that depend on the input of matter and energy to stay alive (49). Negative (self-balancing) and positive (self-reinforcing, runaway) feedback affects both organisms and social systems. He showed that feedback is essential to homeostasis, or self-regulation, for example, the checks and balances of the US constitution (98).

Capra described how Bateson and Maturana both saw mind as a process, not a thing. Bateson saw mind – that is, learning, memory, decision making – as emerging from complexity before brains and higher nervous systems evolved; therefore mind is inseparable from the phenomenon of life (Capra 1996: 169). Maturana thought that autopoiesis, self-organisation, explained life and cognition. An organism responds to environmental changes with structural changes in its autopoietic network, which enable it to continue an intelligent interaction with its environment (262). Lovelock envisaged life on Planet Earth as an ecosystem with an autopoietic (self-regulating) life of its own, metaphorically named Gaia (101–4). These authors argued that all life is interconnected with the material environment, and that life, and mind, has been continuous in the environment since the universe began.

Kolbert (2014) maintained that a massive extinction of species is occurring, comparable to the five great species extinctions that occurred between 400 and 60 million years ago (Kolbert 2014: 15–19). Volcanic eruptions or asteroid impacts may have caused previous extinctions, but humans are causing the present sixth extinction (267–8). According to Ceballos et al. (2015):

> The evidence is incontrovertible that recent extinction rates are unprecedented in human history and highly unusual in Earth’s history. Our analysis emphasizes that our global society has started to destroy species of other organisms at an accelerating rate, initiating a mass extinction episode unparalleled for 65 million years.

Increased CO₂ emissions cause ocean acidification and an increased greenhouse effect, leading to higher atmospheric and ocean temperatures, perhaps making a species’ environment uninhabitable.
and extinguishing it or causing it to invade a more tolerable area. Once there their population
sometimes explodes, without their former predators. Human introduction of new species has
extinguished many indigenous species. When rabbits were introduced into Australia, without
predators their population went out of control (Kolbert 2014: 211). Human expansion may have
cau sed the extinction of megafauna like mammoths, mastodons and giant sloths, killed for food. The
plants that the megafauna fed on, not being kept down, subsequently proliferated, which would have
then affected climate (232). Thus species extinctions can feed back into changes in climate. Catton
(1980: 4–7) argued that for millions of years we have been part of the earth’s ecosystem, and our
impact changed only gradually over millennia. But over recent millennia it has increased and become
destructive and uncontrolled, though our understanding and adjustment to the effect we have had has
not caught up.

Three ecologies

A number of authors argue that mind, society and the natural world are interrelated or united. In A
Land, Hawkes (1953) drew on geology and archaeology to evoke ‘the land of Britain, in which past
and present, nature, man, and art appear all in one piece’ (Hawkes 1953: ix). She linked the creation
of the land with the gradual concentration and intensification of consciousness (4–5), similar to
Bateson’s evocation of the development of mind. The trilobites were aware enough to pursue food
420 million years ago; consciousness evolved from there to its outcome within the human skull.
Fishes advanced consciousness, and senses were refined when reptiles left the water. Consciousness
advanced further once the male had the incentive of seeking and taking the female. Hawkes described
the greater consciousness, and complex senses and brains of mammals – capable of fear, anger, and
family life – finishing with apes and men. She thus envisaged consciousness as emerging: from a
virus, through trilobites, fish, reptiles and mammals, to the minds of men (24–30).

Kumar (2013) saw humanity as ecologically integral to the natural world. Drawing on the Bhagavad
Gita, he described a trinity of relationships which he translated as ‘soil’ (human relationships with,
and part of, nature), ‘soul’ (relationships with the divine, being aware of being part of the whole) and
‘society’ (the relationships of human to human) (Kumar 2013: 17–34).

As noted above, Bateson (2000) made a case for the presence of mind in all kinds of systems, natural
or constructed: an underlying unity of mind, society and nature, way beyond the human mind. He
proposed that:

For the moment, let me say that a redwood forest or a coral reef with its aggregate of
organisms interlocking in their relationships has the necessary general structure. The energy
for the responses of every organism is supplied from its metabolism, and the total system acts
self-correctively in various ways. A human society is like this with closed loops of causation. Every human organization shares both the self-corrective characteristic and has the potentiality for runaway. (Bateson 2000: 490–1)

Guattari (2008) described the intense transformations that the earth is undergoing, and suggested that ‘only an ethico-political articulation—which I call *ecosophy*—between the three ecological registers (the environment, social relations and human subjectivity) would be likely to clarify these questions’ (Guattari 2008: 19). So ‘nature cannot be separated from culture; in order to comprehend the interactions between eco systems, the mechanosphere and the social and individual universes of reference, we must learn to think “transversally”’ (29). Guattari sought a cross-fertilisation of thinking about the mind, society and the natural world.

Dodds (2011) saw systems theory and complexity theory as applying to our environmental problems, particularly uncontrollable man-made climate change, as well as to the mind and to society. In very complex realms like climate science, the brain or society, traditional science provides only a limited understanding of a chaotic, complex world (Dodds 2011: 16, 19). A self-organising system adapts to change while maintaining equilibrium psychologically, societally or biologically, but can give way to self-amplification, triggering a qualitatively different process. Following Bateson, he applied the principles of positive and negative feedback and self-organisation, autopoiesis, to all three ecologies of mind, society and the natural world (19). Thus, psychologically, self-reflection and self-regulation can be seen as negative feedback systems keeping us balanced. Free association and dreams could be self-organised through unconscious non-linear, lateral connections in our brain’s neural network. A manic episode could be a self-amplifying positive feedback system that overrides the negative feedback of self-reflection and self-regulation. At a certain point, resistance to compulsive patterns like addictions or perversions gives way to giving in to those behaviours.

Similarly, human culture and society emerges from multiple interactions at micro and macro levels. Population growth and exploitation of natural resources can be seen as an uncontrollable positive feedback system.

In the natural world, self-organisation emerges when a complex system like an army of ants, shoal of fish or flock of birds ‘senses’ a change in its environment – governed by ‘swarm intelligence’, without a central ‘command structure’. Positive and self-amplifying feedback can overrule self-regulation. Thus increased atmospheric CO₂ causes higher temperatures and more forest fires, leaving fewer trees to absorb CO₂. The higher temperatures also melt the white ice of polar ice-caps, so less heat is reflected into space and temperatures rise still further, while unfreezing the arctic permafrost releases methane, causing still higher temperatures.
Taken together, the work of Hawkes, Kumar, Bateson, Guattari and Dodds make a case for continuity between mind, society and the natural world. In the ecology of society, interpretive communities could be thought of as having self-organising qualities. Bateson and Hawkes go further, to propose a function of consciousness or mind that is not confined to human beings but exists in all structures to varying degrees.

**Eco-psychology**

Eco-psychology is linked to an ecological perspective, so I deal with it in this chapter, concerned with perspectives from social science, rather than in Chapter 2, where I survey psychological perspectives. Eco-psychology takes psychology beyond the intra-psychic, interpersonal and social levels, and relates the self to the environment. Linking psychology with ecology, Roszak (1992) wrote:

> Once upon a time, all psychologies were ‘ecopsychologies’. Those who sought to heal the soul took it for granted that human nature is densely embedded in the world we share with animal, vegetable and mineral, and all the unseen powers of the cosmos … It is peculiarly the psychiatry of modern Western society that has split the ‘inner’ life from the ‘outer’ world. (Roszak 1992: 16)

He suggested that the ecological unconscious, the core of the mind, contains the living record of evolution, so access to it is the path to sanity, and its repression is the root of collusive madness in industrial society. The ecological unconscious, life and mind, emerge as natural systems within the sequence of physical, biological, mental, and cultural systems in the universe (Roszak 1992: 320). This reflects Bateson, Guattari and Dodds’s description of the three ecologies of mind, society and nature.

Ryland (2000) saw the symbol of Gaia as the commonest representation of environmental angst, quoting Lovelock’s (1991) quasi-religious description of his encounter with Gaia:

> For me, the personal revelation of Gaia came quite suddenly—like a flash of enlightenment … I was talking with a colleague … about a paper we were preparing … It was at that moment that I glimpsed Gaia … The earth’s atmosphere was an extraordinary and unstable mixture of gases, yet I knew that it was constant in composition over quite long periods of time. Could it be that life on Earth not only made the atmosphere, but also regulated it—keeping it at a constant composition, and at a level favourable for organisms? (Lovelock 1991: 389–90)

Ryland saw Lovelock’s Gaia as an archetype of Mother Earth, which contains nourishing and destructive maternal opposites. Gaia, to Lovelock, is a stern, tough parent who keeps the world comfortable for those who obey the rules but is ruthless toward transgressors. The integrated, holistic biosphere must be respected to ensure sustainability. The negative side of the mother archetype may
connote anything secret, hidden, dark, anything that devours and poisons; anything terrifying and inescapable. Indian mythology reflects the two aspects of the mother in the image of mother Kali, the goddess of destruction (Lovelock 1991: 392–3).

Randall (2005) suggested that many feelings and views about environmental problems are like ‘feelings and views about the mother which are aggressively infantile or childlike’ (Randall 2005: 6–8). Rust (2004b) saw humans as part of a larger, living, eco-psyche-system which we depend on and are nourished by. We ignore how our t-shirt is made by a child in a sweatshop, our meat from animals reared in factory farms, dosed with anti-biotics and killed inhumanely. If we identified with the other-than-human world, we would be less likely to abuse it (Rust 2004b: 10–11). And as mentioned in Chapter 2, Searles suggested that Mother earth is equivalent to reality, hindering our yearnings for unfettered omnipotence, so we want to be rid of it (Searles 1972: 363–72). Theories of eco-psychology are close to the conclusions of ecology theorists and the three ecologies of Bateson and Guattari.

**Place**

For some of my participants, their childhood environments have played an important part in their feelings and views about the environment. Writers of psychoanalytic perspectives on early childhood experience of the environment often concentrate on early relationships with the immediate physical or non-human world, rather than the child’s connection with his or her natural environment.

Chawla (1992) questioned whether attachments to place were secondary to social attachments, or whether they have an independent existence (Chawla 1992: 63). Many of the writers discussed below treat the child’s relationship with the natural world as separate from their personal and social attachments, but Spitzform (2000, see below) made a connection between parental reassurance and the capacity to explore an environment.

Bodnar (2008) argued that psychoanalysis focuses on the social forces that affect psychic development, but assumes the environment that sustains life and the social world (Bodnar 2008: 485). She noted how human geographers used psychoanalytic concepts to understand the relationship between human mental activity and the environment, thus linking the original object relationship and the environmental field of infancy to a wider terrain (491). She suggested that the lack of a natural environment deprives children of differing interaction styles, a quasi-social domain free of the pressures of human relationships (504). Bodnar (2012: 28–9) interviewed two people with strong environmental perspectives. One grew up in a rural environment, the other attended a school that
incorporated an organic farm, which enabled him to see how his self-consciousness, nature, the environment, community and spirituality were interrelated.

Chawla (1992) analysed feelings for childhood places in 38 autobiographies, and found that the commonest form of attachment was affection for a place associated with family love and security, a sense that ‘this is my place in the world’ (Chawla 1992: 74). She concluded, ‘Children are attached to a place when they show happiness at being in it and regret or distress at leaving it, and when they value it not only for the satisfaction of physical needs but for its own intrinsic qualities’ (63–4). She quoted studies where people remembered outdoor environments disproportionately to the actual time spent there, and had felt a freedom to roam fields, woods or city streets. She argued that children seek the outdoors because it allows them freedom to explore and manipulate the natural environment with a liberty denied them amid constructed places and possessions (76).

Santostefano (2008) argued that the child’s different relationships with people, the natural environment and physical objects become organised, to form what he called a child’s ‘matrix of embodied life-metaphors’. This represents the child’s past experiences, along with his or her interpretation of what is going on in his or her environments, and of how he or she can continue to develop (Santostefano 2008: 523). This is reminiscent of Marris’s (1982) concept of ‘structures of meaning’ described above. Santostefano (2008: 526) referred to one of the childhood memories Freud shared, reported by Gay (1998). Freud left Freiburg aged 3, but mourned ‘especially for the lovely countryside’, and wrote, ‘I never felt comfortable in the city. I now think I never got over the longing for the beautiful woods of my home, in which … scarcely able to walk, I used to run off from my father’. Santostefano suggested that a child’s inner self must develop within a wide range of environments for psychological development, to become one holistic organisation (2008: 531).

Spitzform (2000) claimed that a child learns functional ‘packages’ of skills, through interactions with his or her social and physical environment, based on his or her attachment to their parent (Spitzform 2000: 267). She proposed that the ecological self is an ongoing, evolving structure of interactions with animals, plants and place (270). She drew upon the attachment theory ‘visual cliff experiment’, where an infant typically turns to the caretaker before deciding whether to crawl onto a sheet of clear plexiglass: this shows that the caretaker’s affective response is important to the infant’s confidence in exploring his or her environment. Her clinical experience suggested that the mother’s unconscious affective experience and the child’s are associated (272), making a link between the capacity to explore an environment and a reassuring relationship with the mother.

Heneghan (2013) wrote that childhood might be the time when connection with place is fiercest:
The Winnie-the-Pooh stories express the powerful and intimate connections that we form as children, not only with our toys, which we imbue with life, but also with place, which serves as both cradle and companion. (Heneghan 2013)

For him, ‘the tales of Pooh and his friends are a celebration of... a deep at-homeness in place and time.’ He suggested that ‘we can read Milne’s Winnie-the-Pooh ... through an ecological lens’, believing that access to outdoor experiences is vital for children’s physical and mental health. An attachment to place underlines our connection with the natural world.

For Birkeland (2005: 9), peoples’ relationships to places are as important as their relationships to other people: experience of place is grounded in body experience. Birkeland and Aasen (2012: 112) observed kindergarten children and found that ‘play in undesigned places in nature affords children’s development of sustainable selves, which we locate as a relational field not completely subjective and not completely objective’, something between the children and their environment, like Winnicott’s concept of ‘transitional space’. They saw nature as ‘a holding environment for the child’ (113) and that early experience of nature shapes empathy for the natural world.

Chawla’s key question is ‘whether place attachments should be considered merely secondary effects of social attachments, or whether they have an independent existence’ (Chawla 1992: 63). I interpret this as questioning whether an early attachment to place is linked to or independent of parental influence. Many of the authors referred to above argue that an attachment to childhood natural environments is related, consciously or unconsciously, to an attachment to a mother. I return to this, and to the other issues raised in this section, in considering the evidence from the data in Chapter 10.

Conclusions

In this chapter I have considered sociological and cultural research into the denial of climate change, and the relevance of cultural theory and similar approaches to thoughts and feelings about climate change. I have argued that there is an underlying unity between sociological theories of denial, interpretive communities, and cultural theory and similar theories. I have assessed how far they can be brought to bear on research into factors underlying thoughts and feelings about climate change and the environment. More speculatively, I have explored forms of ecological theory, and attempted to integrate them with psychological and sociological insights.

The more one looks at these issues, the harder it is to distinguish psychological from cultural phenomena. As suggested above, Orwell’s doublethink and Freud’s disavowal seem closely related. Conformity to social norms and interpretive communities resembles the Theban collective disavowal
described in Steiner’s paper. I argue that we are profoundly shaped and restricted by strong cultural imperatives, which can translate into unconscious inhibitions. I realise how culture affects me when I avoid advancing concerns about climate change – for fear that I will be seen as fanatical and ‘holier-than-thou’, and lose friendships. A combined psychological and cultural analysis is needed for this research. Marris (1982: 191–4: see above) offered attachment theory as a bridge between psychology and social science. Perhaps internalised and externalised patterns of object relations underlie both psychological and cultural denial.

Cultural theory has produced significant qualitative findings regarding environmental issues, and particularly climate change. Jordan and O’Riordan (1997) suggest that, applied undogmatically, cultural theory can explain how certain patterns of thinking may shape climate change politics and science. Cultural theory can be useful in providing a rough template to locate the responses of participants in psycho-social research. It has parallels with psychoanalysis in its dynamic approach, which seeks to understand and interpret conflict between cultural groups and within the individual. It provides a profile of a number of interpretive communities and, like psychoanalysis, it has an individual and a cultural dimension.

Chapter 2 was concerned with what, in the context of this chapter, can be thought of as the ecology of mind. Chapter 3 has explored the concept of ecology, particularly the ecology of society, and relationships between the ecologies of mind, society and nature. Ecology, and the integration of the ecologies of mind, society and the natural world, though not prominent in current thinking about climate change, provide a deeper understanding of our present circumstances. An aspect of this understanding may be emerging in arguments for the importance of place in people’s ecological consciousness.
Chapter 4: Methodology

Introduction

My evolving understanding

This chapter describes the methodological approach I have taken in my research, particularly my use of a psycho-social approach and my difficulties in applying it.

How do I know? Buber (1958: 3-4) distinguished I-Thou relationships, that provide knowledge of a person or situation from a direct, equal encounter, and I-It relationships, that create knowledge arising from using that person or situation for one’s own ends. The practice of both psychotherapy and psycho-social research can be an I-Thou relationship, leading to knowledge not otherwise available.

Traditional enlightenment science discovers causes by excluding variables until it is possible to state that ‘x causes y’. As described in Chapter 3, in complex realms like human psychology, human society, or the ecology of the natural world, this kind of single factor science only provides limited understanding. Robert Caper was against ‘trying to make psychoanalysis more expressible in the scientific language we have’, and preferred to ‘change the language of science into something more psychoanalytic’ (Caper 1999: 58), an aim that would apply equally well to psycho-social research. Psychoanalysis sees the human mind as complex, partly unconscious, and making associative links, and is therefore likely to be able to understand the complexities of human emotions, including by understanding counter-transference.

How is it possible to know?

Alexandrov (2009) questioned how it is possible to know. Social research, he said, challenges the researcher’s experience of reality by questioning the nature of knowledge, so he or she must clarify the underlying epistemology. If the researcher believes that the only social reality is discourse, research should deal critically with and interpret interpretations. This calls for self scrutiny, distinguishing different levels of interpretation, and an awareness of power in the interplay of interpretations. This double hermeneutics is arguably intrinsic to scientific reflection in qualitative research (Alexandrov: 30-2).

Reflexive psychosocial research challenges the boundary between subject and object of study. If knowledge is a human construction with incoherent, contradictory discourses, scientific knowledge
does not represent reality; rather, truth is discovered in the consistency and internal logic of a statement and its pragmatic consequences. This epistemological turn converts knowledge from representing 'out there' reality, into a reflective process of co-creating social reality. Knowledge is process not substance. Psycho-social research reveals ethical aspects of knowledge and knowledge production, by exposing the dynamics of the researcher and participant relationship, to increase understanding (33-8).

Dretske (1993) distinguished experience from both belief and knowledge, seeing sensory experience as the basis for beliefs about the world (Dretske: 263-5). Psychoanalytic theory and practice holds that thoughts and fantasies unacceptable to the conscious mind are repressed into the unconscious (see Chapter 2). Counter-transference, a way of achieving greater understanding of the research participant, is part of the ‘sensory events’ of experience. I explore the concept of counter-transference in Section 3 below.

The process of psychotherapy involves the therapist and the patient co-constructing meaning and understanding about the patient’s life and experience, revealed in the exchanges between them that throw light on the unconscious. Having practised as a psychotherapist for many years, I am satisfied that the theory and practice of psychoanalytic work is valid. I am also convinced of the power of social factors that govern human consciousness and experience.

A psycho-social approach

Quantitative studies have illuminated important aspects of thoughts and feelings about climate change and the environment, but a qualitative approach can explore the complex underlying factors in peoples’ thoughts and feelings in ways that quantitative research cannot. Scientists doing ‘normal science’ base themselves on previous work, find both supporting and refuting evidence, and work via ‘paradigms’, or theories, which, Thomas Kuhn proposed (Honderich ed. 1995: 451), can only be challenged by a new paradigm via a scientific revolution. Punch (2000: 14-5, 40) divided research methods into those where pre-existing theories provide a framework within which data generation and analysis then proceeds, and a grounded theory approach, where unfolding themes emerging from data generate new theories.

A psycho-social approach is trans-disciplinary, and seeks to understand the two way traffic between inner and outer worlds. But what is ‘inner’ and ‘outer’, ‘psyche’ and ‘society’, is itself contested within psycho-social studies. These unresolved contradictions in the concept of ‘psycho-social’ studies and are explored in a special issue of Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society, 2008 (Walkerdine 2008: 243-4, Frosh and Baraitser 2008: 349-50, 353-4, 363, Jefferson 2008: 367). Frosh and Baraitser
(349) questioned bringing together the psychological and the social without postulating these two spheres as distinct from one another. They criticised Hollway for incorporating the psychoanalytic subject into both the “psycho” and “social” sections of her term, (351-2), and separating and reifying the “inner” and “outer”, contrary to the psychosocial ambition to theorize them together (363). They saw the subject as ‘always immersed in a flux that is neither inside nor out, but something else – a folding of space that is perhaps closer to the Möbius (strip)’. Similarly, for Hoggett (2008), ‘the hyphen connotes what is “other than” both, that is, what is different from either of the two milieus that generate it’ (Hoggett: 382-3).

Frosh and Baraitser criticised psychoanalytically oriented researchers for their individualizing tendencies, and objected to what they described as the “top-down”, expert-knowledge epistemological strategies of psychoanalysis (347). They objected to psychoanalytic certainties about what is “true” as if it had privileged knowledge and access to the inner world (351-2). They suggested that the depressive position is taken as the norm of mental health, leading an analyst to play the game of reparation, putting things together so that they will make narrative sense (354-5).

Psychoanalytic theory, they suggested, presumes that hidden unconscious motive-forces underlie the surface of social life (353), whereas discursive psychology argues that social, discursive activity constitute phenomena which traditional psychological theories have treated as “inner processes”. Discourse psychology maintains that talk is mediated by the availability of discourses in the social and political realm, and explores the cultural resources that people draw on in accounts.

They proposed a Lacanian approach which would ‘constantly unsettle its own activities and assumptions, and aspire to a kind of critical politics that tests itself through negation, querying its own premises and always seeking to renew its engagement with a space that is neither “psycho” nor “social” ’ (350). The job of psychoanalysis, they thought, is to disrupt sense, to examine the building blocks out of which sense is being produced (354-5), and enable the subject to see what he or she is being subjected to (355-6).

Hollway (2008: 387-8) attempted a psycho-social response to their criticisms, but in describing their arguments as phallocentric and aggressive, she combined a psycho-social discussion with retaliating against what she experienced as an attack. Describing their approach as caricaturing, splitting and paranoid–schizoid, she provocatively reverted to a paranoid-schizoid against depressive dichotomy, though she argued that this was not reductive but part of a psycho-social discussion. Hoggett (2008) maintained that ‘most Kleinians see the depressive position as the acceptance of the impossibility of
closure rather than the achievement of some kind of harmonious integration, while all the time they expose the easy consolation of splitting’ (Hoggett: 382-3).

In Frosh and Baraitser’s approach the subject appears to be passively prone to external forces; ‘what signifier – to what irreducible, traumatic, non-meaning – he is as a subject, subjected’ (355-6). ‘Research ……exposes the ways in which subjects are positioned by the theoretical structures used (by them as well as by researchers) to understand them’ (369). However their description of psychoanalysis as ‘top-down’, based on expert knowledge and certain about what is ‘true’ does not correspond to my or other people’s experience of psychoanalytic work.

Frosh and Baraitser make claims for a Lacanian approach, for example, ‘what the subject ‘‘knows’’ shifts as a result of the interview, as it is co-constructed in and through the interchange with the researcher’ (358); or, ‘The task of the interviewer, therefore, shifts from one of eliciting the interviewee’s ‘‘real’’ views to creating the conditions under which a thoughtful conversation can take place’ (362). These phenomena would apply equally to other psychoanalytic psycho-social research practices.

Throughout the papers in this special edition of Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society psycho-social theory and practice, and the respective merits of Kleinian and Lacanian psychoanalysis are considered, but at times the distinction between them is not clearly maintained.

My aim of finding explanations for respondents’ denial or acceptance of climate change mitigation, drawing on their underlying, unconscious thoughts and feelings, led to my choosing a psycho-social approach, drawing on psychoanalytic theory and practice. Its ‘psyche’ aspect provided parallels with my own professional background. I enhanced this by drawing on other psychological and social psychological theory of the kind outlined in Chapter 3. I used the Free Association Narrative Interview (FANI) of Hollway & Jefferson (2013) as a general model, and followed a modified grounded theory approach in analysing my interview data, starting with different theoretical positions, and using those which seemed to apply to the data.

Research using a psycho-social approach

A psycho-social approach seeks to look beneath the surface of participants’ responses, drawing on psychoanalytic thinking to uncover underlying, inexplicit aspects of their thoughts and feelings, and to interpret their unconscious motivations. The belief that relationships and the social world are inevitably experienced subjectively and there can be no objective social science, justifies this
departure from objective social science. Psycho-social research (Clarke and Hoggett 2009: 9) invites participants to reflect on their history and elicits narratives with the minimum intervention by the researcher, compatible with generating research material. It is a non-probabilistic, grounded theory, opportunistic, qualitative, research approach, which includes the following features.

A ‘grounded theory’ approach; not starting with a pre-set theory, but drawing tentative findings from research material and developing, adapting or changing theory in the light of subsequent findings.

‘Reflexivity’, asking the researcher to consider the influences shaping his or her research, and approach to it. The researcher should take account of his influence on the participant and vice versa; the research process feeds back into the circumstances being researched. Reflexivity thus complicates and blurs traditional science in explaining and predicting phenomena. Thus studying an issue reflects back on and influences the researcher, which then requires the study to be modified, and so on repeatedly.

Recognising the affects of both researcher and participant.

Taking account of transference and counter-transference in the interview.

Taking account of the ‘defended subject’, the participant whose defensive structures are expressed in the research data that s/he provides. Hollway and Jefferson (2013) base their account of the defended subject on the Kleinian account of how we split objects into good and bad objects, in order to defend ourselves against anxiety (17-18). The researcher focusses on ‘what cannot be said’, what might be felt to be politically incorrect or otherwise unacceptable, what is disregarded, splits, polarisations, contradictions, incongruities, inconsistencies, gaps, slips², non-verbal communications like silences and gestures, and what is expressed by images, metaphors and dreams, aiming to encompass all the material.

Noting and seeking to understand contradictions, to become aware of the participant’s anxieties and fears, through the way that s/he interrupts his/her own train of thought or narrative, silences and what appear to have prompted them, and where the participant seems to be answering a question that was not asked.
Taking account of the ‘defended interviewer’ and how s/he avoids observing or responding to unwelcome or disturbing material. The defended interviewer is equally prone to splitting as a solution to anxiety as the defended subject.

Open-ended interviewing that enables the participant to establish their narrative, considering the nature and style of their narrative;

How the participant positions him/herself,

Reading the participant’s discourse sceptically; what we notice, why we notice it, how we interpret it, and how we can judge if our interpretation is right.

Where possible, engaging respondents as co-researchers.

Regular, thorough supervision, peer supervision and reflective research panels.

This can be amplified by discourse and rhetoric analysis, and analyses from quantitative surveys and sociological theory.

A psycho-social approach should be distinguished from particular psycho-social methods. I give an account of one such method, the Free Association Narrative interview, in Section 4, The Interview Process sub-section 6, Free association and narrative in the Free Association Narrative Interview below. Walkerdine (2008: 344) remarked that: ‘examples of psychosocial research currently available almost all concentrate on the use of interviews guided in some sense by psychoanalytic methods: they use very open styles of interview, sometimes several interviews with one person, sometimes with feedback or interpretation...These are usually combined with field notes in which the researcher explores counter-transference issues. There is some attempt to develop the use of group analysis and ethnographic techniques using psychoanalytic insights.’

Comparing psychoanalytic psychotherapy and psycho-social research method

This section compares psycho-social research methodology and psychoanalytic theory and methodology. As a practising psychotherapist it was important for me to be clear about the differences between psycho-social research and psychotherapy. The therapy interview is with a ‘Patient’,
signifying a sufferer and a person considering undergoing a therapeutic experience. A psychotherapy assessment is the nearest psychoanalytic equivalent to the research interview: an enquiry of one or two sessions, enabling the psychotherapist and the prospective patient to work out together how suitable psychotherapy may be for him or her. Many therapists think of such an assessment as the start of a therapeutic process. It is achieved by active questioning in relation to key areas as well as active listening and following up issues raised by the patient’s narrative and comments. Psychotherapy is strictly for the therapeutic benefit of the patient. There is an evident power imbalance between the patient seeking a service and beginning the process of exploring whether and how far to trust the psychotherapist, and the psychotherapist, who possesses the power and responsibility in the situation. However the patient/psychotherapist relationship is also an equal relationship in that a service is being exchanged for a financial reward.

As a psychotherapist conducting a psychotherapy assessment, I need to achieve a complicated and demanding set of aims within a small time frame. I need to assess the nature of the patient’s difficulties, establish as rounded a picture as possible of the patient’s presenting problem and its context, their family background and possible factors influencing the presenting problem, their response to an interpretation, and if possible a preliminary formulation of their psychological difficulties. I need to assess how ready they are for psychotherapy and whether I can help this person in therapy. I need to give them an experience of psychotherapy to enable them to decide, whether they want psychotherapy, and if so whether they want to undertake it with me. I need to establish the framework for a future psychotherapy: fees, payment for missed sessions, times for appointments, contact with GP. An assessment for psychotherapy is potentially the introduction to a long term mutual commitment.

Bateman and Holmes (1995: 140) proposed that challenge and confrontation are needed to stimulate the subject’s unconscious in order to make a full psychodynamic and psychotherapeutic assessment, and Malan (1979: 212) suggested that a psychotherapist can only judge how the prospective patient might respond to psychotherapy through a trial interpretation. Bateman and Holmes and Malan saw interventions as initiating a therapeutic process. Caper (1999: 62-66) went further, to suggest that transference emerges in response to any intervention by the psychotherapist. Coltart (1992: 21) advocated ‘temporarily going against the flow’, employing a ‘confrontation with an uglier…part of’ (the patient). Psychotherapy assessments often evoke positive transferences, so this is intended to lead to “the patient leaving you without too much regret”.

The psycho-social research interview is with a ‘Participant’, signifying a person taking part in the research process or ‘Respondent’, somebody responding to my research initiative. The interviewer is
indebted to the participant for agreeing to be a research subject, because the research interview is essentially for the researcher’s benefit, but the participant is not coming for a service, so he or she is on a more equal footing.

A psycho-social research interview mostly consists of no more than a few interviews with the aim of generating research data. Psycho-social researchers only intervene to advance the research process, not to respond to the respondent’s psychological issues as in a psychotherapeutic process. Hollway and Jefferson (72) noted that ‘clinicians interpret into the encounter, whereas researchers will save their interpretations for outside it’. As a psycho-social researcher, I need to clarify the objectives for the interview, what to expect, ensure their consent is informed, confirm the confidentiality of the interview, and the participant’s freedom to end the interview at any time.

A psycho-social research interview feels much less onerous than a psychotherapy assessment, because the task is not therapeutic, there is no similar clinical responsibility for the participant’s mental health, and there is no expectation of reaching any explicit shared understanding of the participant’s difficulties. As a psycho-social research interviewer, my role is less active and interventionist, because a key aim is to enable the participant to establish their narrative. My other responsibility is to keep a focus on the research topic, which may at times conflict with the job of enabling the participant to establish and sustain his or her narrative.

Malan (210-211) also advocated that the psychotherapy assessor thinks psychiatrically, psychodynamically, psychotherapeutically, practically, and takes care of both the interview and the patient, which implies that engaging with a potential patient is essentially initiating a therapeutic process, whatever the outcome. Since a psycho-social research interview, like any other human encounter, will evoke some kind of transference, it is important for the psycho-social interviewer to be aware of this, though psychiatric or psychotherapeutic skills would seldom be needed.

Hollway and Jefferson pointed out that psychoanalysis focusses on the individual, but the psycho-social approach also includes the interpretation of social issues (72). I would add that a psychoanalytic psychotherapist is trained, analysed and in regular, frequent supervision, which offers safeguards for the patient that the psychotherapist’s negative and destructive aspects will be contained. Such close scrutiny is not essential for psycho-social researchers. Clarke (2002) noted that he could not psychoanalyse research subjects during psycho-social interviews, which would anyway have been unethical, and breach a key safeguard for the participant. He therefore questioned how far we can take psychoanalytic theory and practice out of the consulting room and into the realm of psycho-social research (187). He based his psycho-social approach on counter-transference experience, suggesting
that, 'the first stage of data analysis is the actual listening to, and transcription of, audiotapes.' 'We need to 'immerse' ourselves in the data.' He continued, ‘second, it is important that we have some form of theoretical framework’. His third stage is when ‘the researcher can start to make links and to identify similar occurrences of experience’; this allows the researcher two levels of analysis, the actual interview process, and the common links and themes found in the subsequent analysis of the participant’s data (191).

Discovering unconscious motivations

I adopted a psycho-social approach because my task required a qualitative approach that emphasised the more affective, unarticulated, tacit, contradictory and unconscious dimensions of human attitudes, drawing on psychological, sociological and cultural, or psychoanalytic theory. A psycho-social approach can draw on several other research methodologies, including discourse analysis, rhetoric analysis and grounded theory. Attempting a psycho-social approach inevitably ruled out implementing a semi-structured interview approach.

My knowledge and experience of psychoanalytic theory and psychotherapeutic practice enabled me to use a psycho-social approach, designed to reveal underlying feelings, assumptions and motivations (Clarke 2002, 2006, Clarke and Hoggett 2009). I used the Free Association Narrative Interview (FANI) (Hollway and Jefferson 2000) as part of a psycho-social approach, with an opportunistic, non-probability sample of 20 participants, chosen with roughly equal proportions of males and females and older and younger age groups, with a spread of climate concern and scepticism. Psycho-social theory combines psychoanalytic and sociological understandings, and is designed to achieve a more than surface understanding of interview data. I provide a full account of this approach in Sections 3 and 4.

List of questions and potential follow-up questions

I began my interviews with a general question along the lines,

'I would like to talk over with you your feelings and views about climate change, how they've changed over time, and how they link up with the rest of your life and your past experience'.

In my first few interviews I kept in mind a list of questions that I had framed beforehand, largely based on the findings of quantitative surveys of feelings and views about climate change. I have
attached these as Appendix VI. As I conducted further interviews, I found that I had internalised the issues and was able to draw on them. I used the normal psychotherapeutic technique of picking up on issues that the participant touched on and developing them rather than asking direct questions. This meant that I did not cover the same ground with each different participant. I did not have any prescribed follow-up questions to draw on in relation to participants’ particular responses.

My Participants

Rationale and process of recruitment

I aimed to get a sample balanced between men and women, and between people aged 20 to 40, and people over 40. Initially, I had difficulty in making contact with suitable research participants. Impersonal contacts, like putting up notices in public places, got no response. Eventually I made contact with participants opportunistically through personal contacts, and interviewed seven men and three women in their twenties to thirties, and six men and four women over the age of 40.

Since this was such a small sample, I decided that to seek to introduce further demographic distinctions such as class or ethnicity systematically would become too complex. However I was pleased that the sample included two people on low incomes and others who had had little money as students. Although I did not set out to recruit participants from non-Caucasian backgrounds, two non-Caucasians out of the twenty could be thought of as a satisfactory proportion.

Most of my participants would probably describe themselves as middle class. One had migrated to the UK from Spain, another from the USA; the only two non-Caucasian participants were both British-born, the daughter of a South Asian father and a South East Asian mother, and the son of a West African couple.

Seven participants were either academics or teachers, four were in commercial or professional activities, three were involved in environmental work, two worked in the theatre, two for non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and two in information technology. The sample was biased

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3 Charles, Francis, Holly, Victor, Clive, Mary and Nora
4 Edward, David, Karen and Benjamin
5 Brian, Rosemary and Arthur
6 Pamela and Simon
7 Gloria and Trevor
8 Albert and Louis
away from commercial and towards academic, artistic and NGO activities. I wanted to achieve a spread of thoughts and feelings regarding climate change, from scepticism to belief in, and action on, climate change. I did not investigate their positions in advance, however my participants represented a satisfactory range of thoughts and feelings about climate change and the environment, each one manifesting a varied and interesting mix of awareness, concern, denial and avoidance.

I contacted the first seven of my twenty participants in 2011 as part of my psycho-social research training, ‘Researching Beneath the Surface’. I circulated a notice to the membership of the book group I belong to; two responded directly and group members suggested three others. A member of an environmental group put me in touch with a sixth participant, and a friend, with the seventh, an academic who wanted to interview me about part of my own life experience, and who let me interview him in return.

I conducted the remaining thirteen interviews in 2012 and 2013. I interviewed a supermarket sales assistant after we talked about plastic bags; colleagues put me in touch with four participants; my son gave my particulars to two colleagues of his; and an acquaintance circulated my name to students on a development MA course, which produced four participants, one of whom in turn suggested two further participants. This was the only time that I succeeded with a ‘cascade’ approach, the process of inviting participants to give the names of people who might be willing to be interviewed.

This process of recruitment affected the research process in certain ways. Perhaps more by luck than good judgment, my selected subjects all had interesting material which was relevant to my research subject area, probably partly because all of them knew the subject matter of my research. Eleven participants were self-selected, having responded to open invitations to groups such as the book group that I belong to, colleagues of my son, and students of an acquaintance. The remaining nine had been specifically referred by friends, colleagues and acquaintances who thought that they would be participants who would have a useful contribution to make to my research process. The fact that the participants had all been put in touch originally through a personal contact may have meant that consciously or unconsciously they were well disposed to the research process and its subject matter.
The following table provides basic particulars of my participants.

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The interview settings

The interviews lasted between sixty and ninety minutes. Material from a follow-up interview could have confirmed, modified or contradicted interpretations from the first interview, but this was not part of my initial research design. Doubling the number of interviews, transcriptions and analysis would have altered it, and since my research has been part time, combined with psychotherapy practice, I did not have enough time for this.

The participants whom I interviewed in my psychotherapy consulting room would be aware that I am a psychotherapist, though I did not state this in my Informed Consent Notice. One adopted a consciously self-reflective position, which might have reflected the psychotherapeutic setting, another talked confessionally about sometimes failing to recycle, but otherwise I detected no evidence of the setting having affected the interviews. Those that took place in the participant’s homes may have been more comfortable for them, and I felt at ease with this, given my social work background. The four whom I met in their offices seemed secure and comfortable. I met four in various public places, including two very noisy cafés, and the interviews were interesting and satisfactory in spite of my deteriorating hearing.

I recorded the first seven interviews on tape dictation devices, but the later interviews on digital recorders, which I have duplicate copies of. I found I could transcribe the interviews swiftly using a voice recognition programme, listening to the recording and then dictating what I had heard. This meant that I was free from the possible failings of another transcriber.

After my first seven interviews, I widened my research to include the subject of the environment, with climate change as a key focus. Many participants found it easier to communicate their feelings and opinions about the environment.

The interview process

The influence of the researcher on the participant and vice versa

Naturally, I found it easy to interview participants whose views were in line with mine. Arthur had many opinions in common with mine which made it easy to interview him, despite the interview
taking place in a noisy and crowded cafe. I was more in touch with the affects arising from the interviews when reviewing the transcripts than during the interviews, perhaps because I was concentrating on the being a social researcher not a psychotherapist, and ensuring that I kept to the remit and dealt with the ground I wanted to cover.

Francis framed himself as unaffected by moral issues about climate change, which prompted me to explore this further. His challenges to me may have led me to be more positive in my questioning in response. His moral detachment seemed carefully thought through, and his views on climate change seemed partly based on respect for his father’s and his wife’s climate scepticism, and perhaps partly through his financial dependence on his wife’s work in a fossil fuel corporation and her constant flying in connection with her work. He appeared to feel intellectually superior to the unquestioning liberal left position of colleagues, and was sceptical about supposed threats to society.

Pamela, a young participant from a troubled background, expressed herself freely and often self critically in response to the opportunity to talk about herself and her feelings. The way she described her feelings about her mother’s death when she was one year old evoked a warm counter-transference in me that perhaps reflected her good, close relationship with her grandmother while growing up. Her harsh judgment of herself might be to do with the operation of a severe superego, for example in describing herself as a hypocrite about flying, whose power she has largely modified through a process of self-analysis.

The defended subject

Psycho-social research identifies the need to be aware of and understand participants’ underlying defences. Simon was an example of a defended subject. I was not at ease during my interview with him. I found it hard to respond to his narrative of how he idealised theatre people and dismissed people outside the theatre; and how repelled he was by the countryside and natural world. He seemed in a defensive position, perhaps because of his childhood insecurity due to his father’s early death and his upbringing as an only child, and his unsatisfactory school experience. His climate scepticism might have been part of this defensiveness.

Edward was another example. He expressed a non-negotiable commitment to climate change scepticism and implicitly declined to describe his earlier life and development, providing clear limits to what he would talk about. He managed the interview skilfully, subtly conveying to me when the interview was about to end. His avowed commitment to fair play contrasted with his absolute adherence to a climate change sceptical position. His intense feelings suggested that he unconsciously
needed to commit himself passionately to sticking up for the underdog as he saw it, but his reticence about himself made it hard to speculate what had caused this.

There was a psychological split between Rosemary’s high-achieving side – successfully taking on great challenges in environmental finance – and an underlying depressed side, following her parents’ separation, the loss of the family home, her brother’s and then her ex-husband’s death, and her son’s emotional difficulties. Her depression emerged more when during the interview she questioned her own motivation following her son’s breakdown and her own cancer.

Victor knew about climate change, the environmental consequences of flying and the effect of weather on surfing and he took great pleasure in camping and the natural environment. However, he made it clear that he was content to take a passive position and leave many important decisions to his wife. There was no obvious reason for this passivity in his account of a liberal and stimulating upbringing.

Simon, Edward, Rosemary and Victor are all good examples of defended subjects.

**Reflections on myself as defended interviewer in psychotherapy and research**

A psycho-social approach calls upon the interviewer to be aware of his own defensive reactions during the interview. In this section I give some account of my early life, in order to partly explain aspects of my functioning as a defended interviewer. As I reflect about myself as a qualitative researcher and as a psychoanalytic psychotherapist, believing that an individual’s early relationships and circumstances are strongly formative on his or her later emotional and functional life, I ask myself, what factors have shaped my strengths and weaknesses as a researcher and therapist? And why did I choose to train and practise as a therapist? In both fields my interest in people and how they function has arguably been a strength, but an unawareness and disinterest in my own mental functioning has been a big disadvantage.

I was born in 1937, the youngest of four siblings. The older three were born at two year intervals with military precision, but there is a five and a half year gap between my sibling nearest in age, and myself. After my father died, I came across a note among his papers referring to a ‘mishap’ and some calculations which would correspond to the time of my conception and future birth, which suggests that my birth was unplanned. Between the age of 6 months and one year I was looked after by three nannies, though my mother breast fed me until I was about 9 months old, probably under the Truby
King rigid four hourly schedule fashionable at that time. While still an infant, my mother and older siblings were quarantined for scarlet fever, so I was separated from my mother for at least one month. Unaware of the effect of early separation for infants, she later told me that it was horrible, for her. I saw very little of my father, a Royal Marine officer, after I was 2 years six months old when the Second World War started, as he was completely caught up in the war, and was overseas from 1943 to 1946.

We moved from my birthplace Plymouth to Haslemere in 1939. When I was aged three in July 1940 my father, fearing a German invasion, sent my mother and my siblings and me to Canada in a convoy, where we lived in two different places. On the train from the boat I am reported to have said, ‘I don’t know where we’re going’. After one year my mother was determined to come home to England. She got us passages on a Free French cargo boat by, as she put it, ‘vamping’ the official in charge of allocating passages. The ship travelled without a convoy, risking attack by U boats. She regarded it as her epic achievement, it could also be seen as wildly irresponsible of her. Only later did my mother discover that our ship was carrying high explosives, which explained why the captain did not think life-boat drills were necessary; as if we had been hit we should all have been blown into smithereens.

Twice aged 3 or 4 I am reported to have wandered off to chat to people without my mother noticing. The first time, in Montreal, I was discovered chatting to neighbours a few doors away. The second time, after the ship’s guard rails had been taken down after our arrival at Liverpool, I was found to be missing, possibly having fallen overboard; I was found chatting to some fellow passengers. This might indicate that my mother had difficulty in holding me in mind in view of the multiple difficulties she faced at that time.

We returned to Haslemere and remained there for four years, the longest spell in my childhood in one place. I was mostly on my own with my mother as my brother and sisters were all in boarding school. She felt the separation from my father during the war acutely. She may have unconsciously communicated her anxieties to me about twice crossing the Atlantic with the constant threat of being torpedoed, and then the threat of air raids and V1s and V2s.

When my father returned from the war in 1945, he was withdrawn, frightening and critical. My mother wrote that he treated both her and his children like recruits. I was immediately sent to boarding school aged 9. I was frightened of him, and had minimal opportunities to develop any relationship with him during my childhood. Looking back, I was scarcely coping for much of my time in boarding schools. I conclude that I was dependent on but not close to my mother. At Christmas 1946 my mother was nursing my father on his return from Sri Lanka with hepatitis. I showed my
mother that my urine was also brown, but she insisted that I returned to boarding school and I spent most of the spring term in the school sanatorium.

Between the ages of 8 and 15 we moved five more times, mainly in connection with my father’s various postings, which meant that I had lived in nine different homes by the time I was 15, though this made less impact since I was in boarding schools from 9 to 18. This may also have meant that I did not manage well, particularly at public school where more was expected of me. I was invariably tearful at the beginning of term, and frequently in the wrong place at the wrong time with the wrong books.

A further experience of neglect was my neck injury aged 15. I had a stiff neck after a rugby practice at school, which was x-rayed from the back, and treated as a simple stiff neck. However when the symptom did not go, I was x-rayed from the side, I was discovered to have dislocated my 4th and 5th cervical vertebrae, immediately rushed to hospital and given a plaster cast from the top of my head to my waist, leaving my face clear. I could presumably have been left paralysed from the neck down at any time during those three weeks.

Reflecting about my childhood, I may have been naturally sociable, but ‘talking to people’ might have been a defence against anxiety and the disruption of constant changes. A series of early separations and moves of home probably left me confused and insecure. Until I was sent to boarding school aged 9, I was a virtual only child of a virtual single mother, one suffering from many wartime anxieties and unable to pay me her full attention.

I therefore conclude that, a neglected child, I did not internalise a full sense of being thought about. This helps to explain my difficulty in reflecting about myself. I can see that I have tended to play things down and normalise all the disruptive elements in my childhood, the wartime spirit of getting on with things regardless. My history of broken relationships and disruptions can partly explain why I chose to train as a psychotherapist, involving the reassurance of long term relationships. Perhaps the fact of being brought up by a parent facing terrifying worldwide risks and uncertainties has inclined me towards becoming concerned about a huge and threatening issue such as Climate Change.

The defended interviewer in my interviews

When Charles was telling me about his father’s flight to Britain from Nazi Germany, but he mentioned having been in bomb disposal work during his national service, I was surprised by his nonchalance and distracted into exploring it. I may have been put off from returning to his father’s
escape by his rather dismissive attitude towards him, but perhaps too I was avoiding the painful subject of the Holocaust.

I twice untypically found myself silenced by losing my train of thought in my interview with Francis, while following up on a reference to his personal life. He was apparently perfectly open, but I may have sensed some reticence in him, or have felt inhibited by his moral neutrality and careful self-positioning.

I was surprised by Benjamin’s achievement (which might reflect my prejudice) in coming from an inner-city immigrant background and comprehensive education, getting to Oxford, obtaining an undergraduate placement with the Treasury and qualifying as a corporate lawyer – all of which he played down. He used management vocabulary and ideas a lot, in understated or ironic ways, which made it hard to feel that I had fully engaged him.

I was inhibited from referring to how Clive’s wife was present, silent, with her back to us throughout. The long, sometimes 15-second, pauses before he responded, several times drove me to break the silence with a question when allowing it to continue might have let the interview develop differently.

**Transference and counter-transference**

Transference describes conscious and unconscious feelings and impulses that we transfer across from our early relationships, particularly with our parents, to our present day relationships. In psychotherapy, helping the patient recognise feelings transferred from parents or others to the therapist can enhance his or her self awareness, sense of control over his or her life, and capacity to make more satisfying relationships.

Counter-transference is a form of reflexivity, central to both psychoanalytic work and psycho-social research. It describes the conscious and unconscious feelings the psychotherapist or researcher transfers to a patient or research participant from his or her own early experience, but also feelings that the patient or participant evoke in the psychotherapist or researcher by their unconscious fears and anxieties which they communicate in unspoken ways. Learning to distinguish reflexively the psychotherapist’s feelings evoked from his or her own early experience, from those belonging to the patient, through the psychotherapist’s own psychotherapy, supervision and self-analysis, is a key part of psychotherapy training. As the patient’s unconscious affects the psychotherapist, the psychotherapist’s unconscious must affect the patient. The success of the process depends on the
psychotherapist becoming reflexively aware of these processes. I explore questions about the validity of applying the concept of counter-transference to psycho-social research below.

Clarke and Hoggett (2009, 7) emphasized that "the idea of the reflective practitioner involves sustained and critical self reflection on our methods and practice, to recognize our emotional involvement in the project, whether conscious or unconscious". In research interviewing, the use of counter-transference occurs in a two stage process. First, the interviewer experiences the interaction with the participant, including his or her immediate conscious and unconscious reactions to the experience. Second, he or she has experiences in the subsequent, multiple analyses of the data, including reflexively considering what prompted the interviewer’s interventions and the participant’s reactions to them. I would claim that my psychotherapeutic background enhances my understanding of my patients’ transferences and my counter-transference responses, which provides me with a ‘way of listening’ in my research that would be harder to achieve for a researcher without a clinical background.

Devereux (1967: xvi-xvii) argued that Freud established transference as the basic psychoanalytic investigative method but that counter-transference, not transference, is the crucial datum of all behavioural science and the best way to illuminate human nature.

Hollway and Jefferson (2013) regarded psychoanalysis as the only body of theory that could help to understand the ‘psyche’ part of the psychosocial subject. They quoted Devereux as saying that psychoanalysis should be seen as ‘first and foremost an epistemology and a methodology’ (Hollway and Jefferson: 149). They proposed a psychoanalytic “sensibility” that works with human participants by constantly reworking our knowledge bases (150). They noted how psychoanalysis developed, by using transference and counter-transference to understand what could not be reached otherwise, and saw that psycho-social research developed similarly. The researcher’s reflexivity is central to using transference and counter-transference and his or her emotional responses to enlarge understanding of what is beyond words (166).

For Clarke and Hoggett (2009), psychoanalysis is the best discipline to deepen understanding of reflexivity (8). Transference and counter-transference (12) will inescapably be part of the emotional dynamics of the research encounter. Hunt’s (1989) research in a police department demonstrated how unconscious issues can be generated within the researcher as well as the participant in anthropological research (29), noting her guilt as a researcher over the research task, based on her own unconscious fantasies (44).
Frosh and Baraitser questioned the application of the concept of ‘counter-transference’ as a form of knowledge in psycho-social research, and emphasised the differences between research and clinical work. They noted how reflexive theory emphasises how people construct themselves through positions taken on cultural axes, including that offered by psychoanalysis (358-9). They thought that the most that the researcher’s account of his or her investment in the research process could do is to ‘declare their conscious intentions’ (359-60). Discussing how their research participant made them feel, might represent the ungrounded system of knowledge that its critics object to. However Hoggett defended the use of counter-transference, arguing that ‘we communicate affectively as well as discursively …..because of the inherent limitations of language in expressing experience’. He perhaps implied that an attempt to understand counter-transference is better than ignoring such feelings altogether. He maintained that the subject begins with sensuous inner and outward bodily experiences, first experienced affectively and only later perhaps registered discursively (380-1).

In my research interviews, I thought I had established a positive transference with most participants, though less so when it was harder to establish an emotional connection. I found it hard to reflect on the transference and counter-transference during the interviews, beyond being aware that the interview was going well or less well. As a psychotherapist I would normally take several sessions of psychotherapy to develop an opinion about transference and counter-transference, so I was following my normal practice rather than reflecting about transference and counter-transference issues there and then. This might be an example of me being a ‘defended researcher’, illustrating my difficulty I have referred to above in reflecting about myself.

Rapport in psycho-social interviewing, in other words, positive transference and counter-transference, may enhance the process or prevent underlying conflicts emerging. They were most notably positive when I felt emotionally sympathetic to the participant, and when we agreed about climate change and other issues. My expressing my own point of view to participants with similar attitudes may have enhanced our rapport, but it may have been there anyway as a result of my unspoken attitude. This was particularly true with Pamela, referred to above, who seemed exceptionally mature and whose views corresponded closely with my own.

In several interviews there were moments, similar to those in psychotherapy, when the participant’s affect and content became more intense and he or she seemed to become more trusting and confiding, evidently moments when the transference deepened. These were evident in the interviews with Pamela and Rosemary. These could be seen as examples of the operation of ‘unconscious intersubjectivity’ described on p.80 below.
At the time, I thought that interviews might be less fruitful when I felt less close to or less identified with the participant, or less confident about the interview. Having analysed the data, I was surprised to find that they also produced valuable findings, for example, in the interview with Clive.

Trevor was friendly, communicative and cooperative, and I responded in a correspondingly positive way, though he expressed little interest in climate change or environmental matters, and was sceptical about man-made climate change. Given his mixed feelings about both parents, perhaps he expressed more interest than he actually felt in order to please me, as he might do with his parents.

Benjamin responded coolly, thoughtfully and impersonally. His economics training led him to be sceptical about action on climate change, including on behalf of future generations. I felt some inward frustration and ultimately became more questioning and challenging than usual, probably unconsciously attempting to make contact, and had reacted against his conviction about social enterprise. I felt disappointed when he ended the interview, feeling that I had not established a good rapport with him. I later wondered whether the fact that neither of us referred to his ethnicity contributed to this.

Clive’s inactivity outside work and general diffidence made me slightly frustrated and anxious, and as described above, the long disconcerting pauses during the interview left me uncertain what he felt and how to respond. Afterwards I thought he might have been feeling about me as he feels about his remote and difficult father, which would explain his tentativeness and my uncertainty.

Both Benjamin and Simon can be seen as defended subjects. I was left feeling uncertain of myself and doubtful about the interview’s value. I find it hard to judge what the transference was. With Benjamin it seemed neutral, with Simon he seemed wrapped up in his theatre world and hard to reach. Benjamin’s neutrality, his formality, management language and his downplaying of his feelings and achievements seemed defensive, while Simon seemed to split, treating the theatre as more interesting and exciting than the world outside, and in projecting onto the media the intention to make people feel guilty. He seemed actively repelled by and fearful of the countryside. This all had a defensive quality. Projective identification describes the circumstances where one person unconsciously picks up unwanted feelings from another person, and I may have been connecting with Benjamin’s and Simon’s underlying uncertainties about themselves and the environment.

Free association and narrative in the Free Association Narrative Interview
Hollway and Jefferson (2013) began with the belief that human subjects are simultaneously the product of their own internal worlds and of a shared social world. (xiii). They went on to explain how they distrusted the use of interview methods that assumed that participants used words in the same way as researchers and that they understood themselves well and were capable of giving a clear account of themselves, that their participants could ‘tell it like it is’ (6-11). This approach disregarded peoples’ confused and contradictory knowledge of themselves (3) and the significance of the nature of the questions that the interviewer asks (9). I explained Melanie Klein’s concepts of paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions in Chapter 3. Hollway and Jefferson drew on the concept of paranoid-schizoid splitting as a psychological defence against anxiety in order to understand their participants’ accounts of their thoughts and feelings in greater depth (17-20). They also saw the concept of an anxious, defended subject as social, in that defensive activities affect and are affected by their social worlds, and in that their anxieties draw on real events in the outer world (21). They chose a narrative method in order to understand their participants better. While recognising that narratives do not tell the total truth, they believed that story-telling stayed closer to actual events than explanations. In doing this they drew upon the theory of the psychoanalytic interview, with its emphasis on the interviewer’s need to be aware of his or her own involvement and responses to the interview (30).

Hollway and Jefferson (36-41) advocated the use of the Free Association Narrative Interview (FANI). This can be thought of as comprising two elements, applying the principle of free association, and facilitating as far as possible the participant in establishing his or her personal narrative. They advocated four methodological principles in interviewing. Using open, not closed questions, enables the researcher to track back and focus down on underlying fears and anxieties. Eliciting stories allows for the story teller to reveal more about him or herself than the surface content of the story. The story is co-constructed between the interviewer and the participant, ‘as means to understand our subjects better’ (29-30). Avoiding ‘Why?’ questions side-steps participants’ intellectualised and rationalised explanations about themselves. Responding by using the participant’s own ordering and phrasing respects their own meaning-frames. They claimed that ‘eliciting a narrative structured according the principles of free association’ enables the interviewer to reach concerns that would probably not be accessible using a more traditional method (32-4). One of the main difficulties with the FANI approach is the tension between enabling the participant to establish his or her narrative, calling for an approach with minimal interventions other than ones directed towards supporting the development of a narrative, and keeping focused on the main topic and purpose of the research.

The FANI method includes a second interview, if possible one week after the first, with the researchers listening intensively to the recording of the first interview in the intervening period, leading to the interviewer forming narrative questions for the second interview. These would be
followed by structured questions about issues not already covered earlier (40-1). Hollway and Jefferson thought that the second interview could feel like resuming an established relationship.

The narrative element in this method is easy to grasp and implement, and generally I succeeded in eliciting striking narratives from participants. I did not conduct two separate interviews, owing to the time constraints of combining my research with my continuing psychotherapy practice. Therefore my aim in the single interview was to start with an open-ended question and focus on inducing narratives, following the narrator rather than imposing my own structure, other than raising issues emerging from my associations to the participant’s responses. In the later part of each interview I would follow up with more direct questions about issues that had remained uncovered.

As regards free association, Hollway and Jefferson (34) suggested that ‘by eliciting a narrative structured according to the principles of free association’, whereby the patient is invited to say whatever comes to mind, they get access to a person’s concerns, probably less visible using a traditional method, though they did not advocate that the interviewer should invite the participant to free associate. This interpretation of ‘free association’ seems to stretch its original meaning. Laplanche and Pontalis (1988: 169-170) describe how, ‘voice must be given to all thoughts without exception which enter the mind, whether such thoughts are based upon a specific element (word, number, dream-image or any kind of idea at all) or produced spontaneously.’ This describes a particular aspect of psychoanalytic technique. Hollway and Jefferson used two examples to illustrate the free associative element in the method, in which participants moved from more surface to deeper concerns, or came out with an unexpected fear (36-40). Thereafter they concentrated on unconscious dynamics between themselves and participants.

In their Chapter 2, Hollway and Jefferson (2013) described unconscious defences as intersubjective, affecting and affected by others (21), where they gave examples of unconscious association. This is closer to their concept of ‘unconscious intersubjectivity’ (42), which is more a specific concept than their unclear definition of free association, and is a more accurate description of what can be happening between interviewer and participant. Thus, where Hollway made an empathic response, ‘It must have been petrifying’, the participant added a frightening detail, ‘It were, cos ‘e were threatening it (a knife) to me throat.’ They gave further examples of unconscious links which they described as the result of free association (67, 69), and asserted that their ‘data production is based on the principle of free association’. For them, the FANI ‘encourages the expression of the uncertain, and the possible emergence of the unthinkable’. They saw transference and counter-transference in research as the researchers’ unconscious ‘embrace’ of the participant, such that their ‘imagination was full of him or her’ (64-5).
The following are examples of narratives that participants established in my research. Francis described his detached position about climate change, which he connected to his father’s and his wife’s scientific background and to his wife’s work as an executive in a carbon energy company.

Nora gave a moving account of her difficulties in living an environmentally friendly life and surviving on a low income, her ignorance of the discharge of CO2 into the atmosphere, and her preoccupation with bringing up her son aged three, who was also present during the interview.

Trevor described his family of origin, his sister’s depression, his father’s stroke, his mother’s father’s suicide and his mother’s subsequent alcoholism, his great grandfather’s murder and his grandfather’s traumatisation during the Spanish Civil War, his move to London away from his family, and his commitment to journalism and human rights.

Benjamin described his parents’ family origins in West Africa, his father’s struggles to gain an education against his own father’s wishes, his own success in going to Oxford from an inner city comprehensive, and his progress from studying economics and working in corporate law to working in poverty alleviation and social enterprise. For both Trevor and Benjamin, climate change was less central for them.

An example of what I would prefer to call ‘unconscious intersubjectivity’ in my interviews was the spate of associations when Holly described the importance for her of having contact with the natural world, and walking the Thames footpath. When I noted the importance for her of weather, she explained that she would be spending Christmas in South America and the Caribbean, an odd experience to be spending Christmas in a warm climate. I was struck by the contradiction of her avowed environmentalism and her flying away for a holiday, and asked her about her feelings about flying. This led on to a string of associations, her saying that she knows flying is bad, they do carbon offsetting, on holiday they try and live like locals, her in-laws won’t fly on environmental grounds, she admires them, also jokes about them, she knows that heli-skiing is terrible but she does it, she’s severely intolerant of non-recyclers.

Another example was when Pamela described the loss of her mother when she was 15 months and her father’s mental illness and divorce from his second wife when she was 8 or 9. She had felt anger which has taken her decades to work through and had felt that God didn’t love her; then she had to be logical, forget things, and become strong through being self-sufficient. I returned to her having earlier spoken of our responsibility towards future generations, and she then described how she had been
resisting thoughts about having children, although she has always wanted them. She described movingly how she had recently traced this to the fact that she was nearing the age when her mother had died. She was in tears as she described how a fortune teller had told her mother that she wasn’t going to die of the cancer she was afflicted by. She wouldn’t want to put a child of hers through the suffering that she had been through of not knowing her mother. She went on, that she now felt that there was someone looking out for her.

Rosemary’s interview was rich in examples of associative links. Her euphoric descriptions of her childhood and thriving entry into the world of environmental policy after university led me to go back to her mention of brother’s death whom she had been close to. She couldn’t remember when it had happened and thought that her involvement in her environmental activities had distracted her from the pain of her brother’s death; and her parents’ divorce, leaving her without a family home to return to.

She went on to say that she felt that her son had been the sufferer because of her career, and added that she hadn’t mentioned that his father had died. Later she described how she felt that she had been too frightened to continue with a career in green finance in East Asia. I was prompted to question whether there had been a split in her between her high-flying career woman side and her bodily and animal nature. She said she thought it was significant that her cancer had attacked her reproductive organs, but linked this to her husband’s death and her realisation that she wasn’t going to have the large family she yearned for. I asked her about his death and she described having become involved with him, their deciding to marry though he admitted he had homosexual feelings, then leading to him coming out as gay though they really did love each other. She was in tears as she told me of his dying from AIDS. A further illustration was when she described her realisation just then that she did not simply feel a love of nature but a deep feeling for ‘my nature’, the particular countryside where she had grown up, like salmon returning to their home rivers and the migration patterns of birds.

‘What cannot be said’

What cannot be said, can reveal unspoken or unconscious factors. With Gloria, something may have been implied by the awkward silences during which I sometimes felt uncomfortable. These may have expressed her reservations about what we were discussing. She seemed unrelaxed and tentative and several times concluded a statement saying, ‘I don’t know’, which led me to ask follow-up questions. Victor often described matters as ‘strange’, ‘interesting’ or ‘weird’, which seemed to be ways to avoid saying exactly what he felt. This might have been to disguise an underlying left wing position that he thought imprudent. Benjamin often used understatements like ‘probably’ or ‘maybe’ which expressed irony. They may have fulfilled the function of hinting at issues without making them explicit, as with
his grandfather’s attitude towards his father being educated. Neither of us referred to his ethnicity or to any potential racial discrimination he may have experienced.

Images, metaphors and dreams

In general, my participants used relatively few metaphors, similes and comparisons, and there were few references to dreams, but the metaphors that Edward, Francis and Rosemary used do reveal unspoken issues. Edward used quite violent metaphors: ‘I kick myself’; people describe the climate change threat as ‘Armageddon’; he was ‘flying the flag’ for the under heard climate sceptics; he described Lord Moncton as ‘a manic tilter at windmills’; he described environmentalists as being ‘like Hitler’.

As described in Chapter 5, Francis may have been betraying some unconscious anxiety through his quite extreme metaphors: that a fossil fuel company was demonised; that belief in climate change had no effect on day to day life, like believing in life after death; that fossil fuel companies, like arms dealers, simply produce what people demand; that people are sacked from his wife’s company like Stalinist purges.

Rosemary described two phases of her life very differently. She described getting involved in environmentalism after university in excited language; ‘suddenly I was running faster than I knew how’; ‘I came out of university absolutely like, like a cannon ball out of a cannon’. She described the failure of environmental finance to respond to the financial crash of 2007-8 in similarly dramatic but opposite terms: ‘the crash revealed, all of us ....in finance, for having absolutely (she laughs) no clothes on’; ‘those two events have sort of knocked the stuffing out of me’.

Positioning

All my participants took up positions in the interview. Charles positioned himself as a terrified old man in relation to climate change, but implicitly questioned this, wondering if he was just collecting awful stories. He said he didn’t feel guilty when he denied climate change, he put up a wall. Francis positioned himself as sceptical about himself, questioning his own sincerity, focussing on his immediate concerns and disregarding the impact of climate change on the rest of the world and future generations. He could have been avoiding possible criticism from me by his self questioning position. Pamela positioned herself as ethical and idealistic, emphasising personal responsibility, and suggesting, contrary to popular negative perceptions, that estate agents are good because they find people homes. She adhered to a strongly environmental agenda but described herself as a ‘hypocrite’.
about flying and criticised herself for not being aware of her grandmother’s feelings. She was accepting of other people, except motorists’ attitudes towards cyclists, was aware of her underlying anger and of her strengths and weaknesses springing from her necessary childhood independence, and realised that wanting to help others was a way of dealing with her own difficulties. Her difficult childhood seemed to have led her to think through her feelings to a settled position. Benjamin positioned himself as professional, emotionally neutral, modest, altruistic and business–oriented, downplayed his achievements, and adhered to a consistent economic position. This felt like a mask which he hid behind.

Data Analysis

Approaching data analysis

In this section I describe how I analysed the data. The process of transcribing each interview evoked immediate reflections. Data analysis was a laborious but potentially rewarding process of going over and over the data until patterns became clear. This has led to my getting to know and understand my participants’ data as they presented themselves. I have mostly felt confident about understanding the psychological dimensions of my participants’ experiences, but have found understanding the social dimensions more difficult. Norgaard (2011: 92-5, 211-5) reported the pressures on her participants to conform to social norms, cultural practices, the subtle exercise of power, and environmental privilege, and Lorenzoni et al. (2007: 453) showed how participants are influenced by membership of interpretative or cultural communities. These factors have been subtle and harder to detect and analyse, but my sustained analytic work has produced interesting and valid themes. I expected to find data dealing with forms of denial. A number of themes emerged out of repeated readings of the data, from which I selected the most striking and repeated patterns. These were, the influence of early upbringing on later environmental commitments, the implications of a feeling of empowerment, and the implications of wealth or poverty.

Psycho-social methodology includes immediately recording reactions and impressions after interviews, which I found hard to implement, due to the limitations of my own pathology, but I had strong and varying emotional responses to the experience of each interview on reviewing them later, often reacting differently in retrospect compared to my reaction at the time. This encouraged me to question my reactions, and gave me two views of the material.
The method prescribes keeping a research journal, and I kept a psycho-social self-reflexive research diary for about two years, but failed to keep it going. As a psycho-social researcher I lack the positive narcissism to sustain interest in my own emotional life and thought processes, for the reasons alluded to in Section 13 above. I hope this has not been detrimental to my research, and that my awareness of this in myself is a sign of reflexivity.

I tried various methods of organising the data in order to analyse it, experimenting with various forms of Word for Windows tables. I lack the necessary expertise to apply Excel for data analysis. I used Google Drive as a tool for organising and analysing data similar to Excel, but it is inflexible and I could not find a way to transmit material analysed in that form to supervisors. I considered other analytic frameworks including that proposed by Kvale (1996: 187-209) but came to the conclusion that the frames of reference I had developed dealt with the themes that had emerged more satisfactorily and flexibly.

I have found it difficult to convey the length and complexity of the process of data analysis that I was involved in over three years. However the material I was analysing was complex and diverse, and many of the themes only emerged over months and years of repeated consideration. Often a piece of material from one participant would send me back to another participant’s material, so considering one piece of material cross fertilised another.

I have found it difficult to decide how to present the data intelligibly in the thesis. Presenting themes such as forms of denial, would have got away from a case study of an individual participant. Focussing on individual case studies would have expressed a participant’s thoughts and feelings about climate change and the environment, but would have lost the thematic element. This dilemma in itself illustrates the complexity of the problem of presenting my findings. I settled for a compromise; in Chapter 5, two individual case studies include various themes, which are described, amplified and illustrated in Chapters 6, 7 and 8 with vignettes from other participants’ interviews.

The supervision by my three supervisors, and their contributions each played a key role in developing my understanding of the material in the interviews.

I was grateful for my limited opportunities to present aspects of my data to the university departmental PhD workshops and in talks to professional bodies. Psycho-social method calls for supervision by peer review panels as well as academic supervisors, and I regretted not having found time to gather a peer review panel. This may be easier if one is working within a department where
others are conducting psycho-social research, so that getting people together is not a major undertaking.

Reading the participant’s discourse sceptically

Psycho-social methodology invites us to read the participant’s discourse sceptically; what we notice, why we notice it, how we interpret it, and how we can judge if our interpretation is right. I do not give examples as I have given numerous illustrations in the course of this chapter.

I notice questions in my mind about why the participant is taking part, themes, positions, repeating patterns in material, psychodynamic factors including manifestations of the superego, hints of feelings, family influences, tentative or definite styles of self presentation, isolated discordant emotions, underlying thoughts and feelings about government, ethical contradictions between economic and environmental attitudes, and social attitudes that express underlying emotions.

Why I notice things stems from my own belief systems, about family, theories of denial and motivation, and the emotional impact of and my responses to data; and my liking for or lack of response to the participant and his or her position.

I interpret by looking for themes, consistencies and inconsistencies in data, and comparisons with other participants, and consider the relevance of theories and quantitative findings.

I judge my interpretations by seeking how far the findings are consistent overall; I seek confirmation of my findings from my supervisors; I trust my unconscious responses or gut feelings; and I question my spontaneous responses to particular participants. I hope that the examples I have given above illustrate my sceptical approach to my data.

Reflective research panels

Hollway and Jefferson (160-3) outlined various uses of panels to illuminate further forms of individual data analysis. However they did not prescribe the use of reflective research panels as indispensable to the data analysis process. Clarke and Hoggett noted that Wengraf and Chamberlayne emphasised the importance of the research panel, in ‘forcing’ greater objectivity in data analysis (19). They noted that psycho-social approaches to data analysis are very labour intensive. In practice, reviewing the various examples of psycho-social research described in their book, perhaps the
contributors’ findings were enhanced by the use of panels, there are very few references to the use of reflective research panels.

At the early stages of my research process, I was enthusiastic to participate in a process of peer review via reflective research panels. I approached a number of London based university psycho-social departments and individuals involved in psycho-social research. However none of these came to the point of the formation of a panel.

I did take advantage of the opportunity to present my work twice to my professional body, first, the Lincoln Clinic and Institute for Psychotherapy and then its successor, the British Psychotherapy Foundation. I also presented to the UWE psycho-social workshop twice in 2010, once in 2011 and once in 2013, and to conferences for PhD students to present their work, at Middlesex University and elsewhere, at a UKERC conference in September 2013, and at organisations such as the Highgate Climate Change Network, the Sutton Counsellors’ AGM and the joint conference between the Association for Psycho-social Studies and the Climate Psychology Alliance in 2015. I found these useful in making me think thoroughly and succinctly about my work, but it was difficult to elicit a critical approach to my data analysis.

Following the UWE ‘Researching Beneath the Surface’ training in 2010, a number of participants decided to attempt some kind of internet forum for discussing research material. I thought there could be a number of difficulties involved in such a long distance approach, but I was particularly put off by the use of Facebook as a channel of mutual communication, as I distrust the confidentiality of social media.

There was the possibility of participating in a Climate Psychology Alliance with Institute of Group Analysis series of group meetings in 2014, which might have been helpful, but unfortunately I was not going to be free at the arranged time.

By 2014 I was experiencing considerably restricted mobility because of arthritis in my ankle, and since a failed operation to fuse the ankle in December 2014 my mobility has been very limited, which has disinclined me to initiate activities involving too much travel.

I admit that I was put off from taking the initiative in pressing for the formation of such panels by my fears about the amount of time that would be involved, in travelling to meetings. I also calculated that if there would be two other participants as well as myself sharing time in a panel, and if we were to have a number of panel meetings, this would involve very much more time than I had available to me.
As a psycho-social researcher working in isolation there have therefore been plenty of obstacles in the path of forming a reflective research panel. My comfort in working in isolation and lack of urgency about setting up a panel may reflect a self-sufficiency stemming from an isolated and neglected childhood. However I have been accustomed over 50 years to submitting my social work and psychotherapeutic work to close scrutiny, by individual supervisors, in peer supervision groups and during training, therefore I do not think that I have been a defended researcher for fear of close examination of my work.

How my opinions were formed through self-reflection

I have found difficult to reflect on the process of analysing my data. I have advanced a potential explanation for this in section 8 above, namely, not having internalised an interest in me, leading to a deficient interest in the workings of my own internal world, springing from experiences of separation and neglect. Added to this, it is difficult to reflect about my circumstances seven years ago when I began. However I have remained emotionally committed to the process throughout, I enjoyed all the interviews, and most people said that they had enjoyed talking about themselves, or that it was good to reflect about what they think and believe. As indicated, the two participants who were in tears for part of the interview were positive about the experience.

My opportunistic selection of participants provided me with a satisfactorily diverse sample of thoughts and feelings, each participant contributing different and unexpected insights. I approached data analysis without strong feelings except some trepidation, given the emphasis in texts describing the psycho-social approach on repeatedly reviewing, refining and modifying one’s analysis of the data. Transcribing the interviews was an important part of the data analysis process. I found myself considering the interviews and was sometimes surprised to find an interview more productive than I had thought.

I then analysed the interviews looking for patterns of content, and of response to the interview situation. This involved repeatedly reviewing each interview to find patterns, which was a lengthy, time-consuming and at times laborious process. I had to test and develop analytic frames of reference by trial and error, to enable me to compare interview data from different participants. This involved rejecting those that produced no worthwhile findings. However the process was absorbing and enriching and led me to engage more deeply with my participants and the data.
My original focus was to analyse forms of denial to be found in different participants’ interview data. It took time and considerable help from my supervisor to formulate the framework for analysing denial as I have outlined in Chapters 2 and 3. It was a lengthy process to develop a feeling for and respond to and identify the vide variety of forms of denial among all my participants’ data.

Braun and Clarke (2006) described the use of thematic analysis, a process closely related to the grounded theory that Glaser (2004) wrote about. Braun and Clarke and Glaser both described identifying themes in data that identify assumptions and ideologies. Braun and Clarke defined a process of: familiarizing yourself with your data, generating initial codes, searching for, reviewing and defining and naming themes, and producing the report (87-93). Glaser emphasised that grounded theory is strictly a process for generating theory, which ‘emerges from the data not from extant theory’. He described a process of coding the data line by line, the process of data collection being controlled by the emerging theory. Incidents are compared to other incidents to generate more theory, then concepts are compared to more incidents, leading to concepts being compared to other concepts. The aim is for a core variable to emerge. Thereafter coding is limited to variables that relate to the core variable in sufficiently significant ways. Following Braun and Clarke (80), I take responsibility for identifying, rather than claiming that the associations ‘emerged’, between rural childhoods, strong maternal influences and an environmental approach, often with a particular interest in climate change, from the data of certain participants, as I have identified in Chapter 8. Similarly, city-bred participants often did not have an environmental sensitivity. I applied a modified form of the thematic analysis that Braun and Clarke, and the grounded theory that Glaser, described. As I was following this kind of approach, with no particular expectations, I was rewarded when these patterns emerged.

Both wealthy and poorer participants justified their non-environmental positions, and following a grounded theory approach allowed me to challenge my expectation that well-off and less well-off participants would have contrasting responses to climate change.

The ‘social’ aspect in a psycho-social approach is complex, as there is no unified social, societal or sociological discipline – unlike in psychoanalysis – so I have sought to apply social surveys, social psychology, psychoanalytically inspired sociology and discourse-based ecological theory. I may have gathered too much ‘social’ theoretical and methodological background, and may have been less successful in applying it to the analytic process.

How decisions were taken about what data to present in detail
This section describes how I decided which participants to refer to in greater depth, and why I did not include others. In general, I made use of data from interviews because themes had already emerged from the data overall and particular data extracts illustrated these themes well. They also gave those particular participants a voice. Data from interviews with other participants did not illustrate the particular themes selected so well. I was unable to represent all the participants in that degree of depth in a thesis of this scale. I have reviewed the interviews considering first the method and process of interviews, and secondly their content.

Participants I considered in greater depth

I begin with the participants whom I decided to consider in greater depth. I have started with the issue of myself as a defended interviewer. Francis was the sixth participant I interviewed, so at that point I was still relatively inexperienced. His interview was the only one in which I twice found that my mind had gone blank while I was in the act of raising a question with him. This did not occur in the same way with any other participants. I can only explain this given that the apparently innocuous questions concerned his personal or family life. This suggests that an unconscious process, perhaps some defensiveness about talking about his family, prevented me from continuing in the same train of thought, though both times I did recover the issue I wanted to raise within a few moments.

I was also insufficiently aware of the important part played by transference in this interview. When I outlined my psycho-social method he immediately commented that it was a challenging approach, and at other times he disputed remarks that I had made. It emerged later that he still had fairly intense and complex feelings about his father, whom he respected as a scientist, but whom he virtually explicitly described himself to be in Oedipal rivalry with. He implied that not learning to drive until recently was to spite his motoring enthusiast father.

Francis presented his feelings and views about climate change in a morally neutral way, saying that he would not justify his position in moral terms. He described himself as ‘being green’ in ways that do not damage his lifestyle, and made it clear that he was aware of and apparently unconcerned about the environmentally damaging consequences of frequent flying. On reflection, I could have become more aware of and sought to challenge his carefully constructed moral neutrality about climate change.

With Benjamin, I did get beyond his surface presentation of himself. He described his development as the child of African immigrants, attending an indifferent school, transferring to a better one, on his own initiative, getting a place at Oxford, having a placement at the Treasury, then training as a city solicitor before progressing to the field of social enterprise. He described all this in a low key way,
saying only that he had never suffered much self-doubt about his abilities. He used ‘management language’, and I did not succeed in reaching any more personal feelings beyond his commitment to enlarging opportunities practically for poor people in the developing world. The most personal aspect of his interview described how his rural farmer grandfather in Africa denied his father the opportunity to be educated, and his father’s struggles to get education, but he described this neutrally too.

I was also a defended interviewer with Clive. His wife was silently present with her back to us throughout our interview, but I did not question this. I also found difficult the long ten or fifteen second pauses following comparatively short statements of his, which sometimes drove me to ask a supplementary question or change the subject when a FANI approach would have implied giving him more time to respond. He later explained that he found his father uncommunicative and hard to be close to, which could have enabled me to interpret his long silences as reflecting a paternal transference, rather than allowing myself to feel threatened by them.

Something not spoken about

Victor, Benjamin and Clive were also chosen because they illustrated the problem of something not being spoken about. Victor often described matters as ‘strange’, ‘interesting’ or ‘weird’, which seemed to be ways to avoid saying exactly what he felt. I did not question these evasions at the time. Neither of us referred to his ethnicity or to any potential racial discrimination he may have experienced. Clive’s long pauses and the presence of his wife referred to above can also be taken as examples of something that could not be said. Benjamin often used understatements like ‘probably’ or ‘maybe’ which expressed irony and perhaps disguised his feelings and reduced the impact of some of his statements. He described his grandfather as ‘not seeing education as wholly necessary’, and ‘not particularly enthused about his father being educated’. And he described being a city solicitor as ‘not the most inspiring way’ to spend a career.

Unconscious intersubjectivity

Holly’s, Pamela’s and Rosemary’s interviews provided examples of moments where there was unconscious intersubjectivity, which I have described in section 20 of this chapter. Holly was describing her enjoyment of the natural world, in all sorts of weathers, but when I said, that this brought us back to the question of climate, she talked about spending Christmas in South America and the Caribbean, which then led on to her talking about her guilty feelings about flying a lot, carbon off-
setting, and from there to talking about her sister-in-law and her husband who will not fly on environmental grounds but go everywhere by train.

With Pamela, she had been describing the implications of her mother’s death when she was an infant and her father’s separation from her step-mother, and when I returned to an earlier discussion about future generations, she described having recently unpacked a bit of her subconscious and discovered that though she wanted to have children, she has been unconsciously blocked from thinking about the question; she tearfully explained that the reason might be that she herself was approaching the age at which her mother died, and she would not want to put any child of hers through the experience that she had had.

Towards the end of our interview, Rosemary was describing the conflict that she felt between her flourishing career in ‘green’ finance and her responsibilities towards her mentally ill son and his family, and her earlier desire to have lots of children. She continued, to describe her suspicion that there might have been an unconscious reason for her to get a cancer of her reproductive organs. This led her to talk in greater detail about her relationship with her husband, whom she loved and admired intensely, who had warned her that he had homosexual feelings before they married, which she disregarded. She went on tearfully to describe his being driven to ‘come out’ as gay after two years, and then he got AIDS and died, and the impact that this had on her.

Complexities of denial

Interviews with Francis, Holly, Rosemary, Victor and Benjamin all illustrated complexities of denial that they variously found themselves in. Francis described his pro-environmental, uncommitted ‘green’ position, that doesn’t cost anything, consistent with his hypocritical environmentalism (his description), and in describing his benefitting from his wife’s frequent flying through her work he implied some environmental feelings. He went on to describe his improbable ‘vague awareness’ that some countries in Africa and Asia would be very hard hit by climate change. He himself noted a contradiction in himself when he described himself as talking in rather a strange way, in that he kept saying things that ought to but do not affect his attitude.

Holly spoke of her absolute commitment to recycling, her pleasure in her enjoyment of the natural world, and, inspired by the example of her sister-in-law and her husband, her aspiration to live environmentally, yet without apparently seeing any great inconsistency, her enjoyment of flying and heli-skiing which she described as ‘wicked’ but she does it because she can afford to.
Rosemary had apparently had a number of times when she had denied contradictory themes in her life. She had plunged enthusiastically into environmental campaigning on leaving university at a time when her beloved brother had recently died and her parents had separated, leaving her with no home base. As described above, she married a man that she deeply loved, but who warned her that he had homosexual tendencies, and who subsequently came out as gay, got AIDS and died. She also felt torn between her responsibilities towards her son, who had long term psychological difficulties, and her developing and flourishing career in environmental finance, particularly in South East Asia, which involved her in considerable travelling.

Victor explicitly described how he and his wife flew a lot for their holidays, despite being fully aware of the environmental damage caused by flying. He drew the analogy of meat-eating. One can know how horrendous meat production can be, yet one can choose not to think about it.

Benjamin had an apparently clear and carefully thought out position as regards climate change. He described how he was aware of the scientific findings, but there might be nothing that can be done as we may have passed some relevant barriers already. He considered that if one considered the interest of future generations, industrial production would have to stop, and that it was more important to consider the interests of present than future generations.

Arthur several times noted complexities and contradictions in his and other people’s positions, and acknowledged the difficulties without attempting to reach any false resolution of them. An example he gave was the fact that a massive part of the pensions industry is invested in oil companies, so neither government nor financial services want to jeopardise that. Another was the contradiction was his need to fly a lot in the interests of environmental journalism. Another was his awareness that emerging countries like China, Brazil and India will hugely increase then demand for air travel. At one point he admitted that he did not have the answer to people wanting to go on environmental holidays but having to fly there.

**Inner dividedness**

Rosemary and Simon were good illustrations of how split and divided participants could be. Rosemary, as explained above, had largely denied the painful losses of her early adult years. She also experienced a division between her career and her responsibilities towards her son. She also divided her career into two distinct parts, before and after 9/11 and the 2007 financial crash. Simon made a sharp division of the world into the world of theatre that he idealised, and the world outside which he disparaged. He also split urban life and country life into two absolutely separate worlds.
Effects of trauma

Pamela, Rosemary, Trevor and Clive were all examples of people who had been affected by traumas. As described above, Pamela had had to struggle for years to overcome her mother’s death when she was an infant and then her father’s mental illness and divorce. Her brother’s death and her parents’ divorce undoubtedly affected Rosemary profoundly. Trevor’s paternal great-grandfather’s assassination during the Spanish Civil War, his grandfather’s traumatic experiences in the war, his maternal grandmother’s death and his grandfather’s consequent suicide and his mother’s consequent alcoholism must all cumulatively been transmitted to him. And Clive unspokenly conveyed the impression that his parents’ divorce and his having to alternate between his mother in Devon and his father in the London area had a destructive effect.

Pamela, Rosemary, Arthur and Clive were all examples to varying degrees of people where there had been the combination of a committed and enthusiastic environmentalist mother, a country upbringing and their own environmental approach. Conversely, Simon and Benjamin were good examples of people brought up in inner city environments with loving, supportive but non-environmental parents, who had no environmental interest.

Participants whose material I used less.

I now consider the participants whose material I made less use of. First, there were a number of participants whose narratives and positions I found interesting and valuable but whose material I could not include for reasons of space. Charles had many interesting things to say and a fascinating narrative of his career and interest in climate change. Karen represented a working class woman and her struggles to understand climate change, the difficulty of keeping in touch with the natural world living in an inner city flat and the effect of the trauma of her husband’s death when they were both still so young. Nora also represented the difficulties of living environmentally on a low income in the inner city and her struggles to grasp the issues of climate change. I could also have made more of Simon’s narrative of having lost his father as an infant and having been brought up by a single parent devoted to his well-being and his finding his way into the theatre world from an uninspiring educational environment. Mary also had an interesting narrative of having been brought up on a farm in the mid-west of the USA, her disagreements with her father about his introducing industrialised farming, her exploration of the relationship between geology and her work as an artist. Charles, Gloria and Mary all illustrated the theme of contradiction and complexity.
There were a number of participants where I felt I had not fully engaged them and therefore the interviews did not reach their potential, in spite of producing interesting material. This was true of the interviews with Albert who seemed disillusioned and detached, David who was particularly interested in the field of heating, Gloria who seemed at a turning point between NGO work and business consultancy and who seemed at some level uncertain and not expressing her underlying feelings, and Louis who was very preoccupied with the ideas of various academics.

**Ethical issues**

As a psychotherapist, the duty of care towards the patient and the emphasis on confidentiality are all important, so throughout the research process I have held in mind the importance of behaving ethically towards my participants and their data. Punch (2000) describes key research ethical issues: informed consent, privacy, confidentiality, ownership of data, the use or misuse of results, trust, reciprocity, and the potential for harm or risk. I provided every participant with an informed consent notice about the research, (Appendix IV), outlining the nature of my research, my aims in the interview process, the anonymising of research data to make participants unidentifiable, and their right to withdraw at any point. They each signed a consent form (Appendix V). All data in the thesis has been anonymised, and access to the sound recordings and transcripts on my computer is only possible via a secure password. The informed consent notice does not reveal that I am a psychotherapist.

My research raised relatively minor overt ethical issues. I have encountered two participants from the first seven interviews distantly in unforeseen social situations. I felt uncomfortable that they have given me privileged information about themselves but they seemed untroubled by this. It may have been a mistake to have participants where there was any chance that I might encounter them outside the research process.

I decided that there would be no confidentiality issues regarding the four interviews in cafes and public places. Two were in fact reasonably private, two took place in very noisy cafes where, it was hard to hear each other, so it would be doubly hard to be overheard.

Nora brought her three year old son with her. He made his objection to the interview perfectly plain during the interview, but despite this we had a constructive and valuable interview and I concluded that there was no confidentiality or other ethical issue.
While I interviewed Clive in his living room his wife sat silently with her back to us. I felt inhibited from bringing this up. I knew she had a medical condition as he had rearranged our original appointment in order to take his wife to hospital. There were sustained silences before he responded, so I felt driven to ask more questions than usual. I took this to be his usual way of interacting, but his wife’s presence may have inhibited either or both of us from some areas of discussion or from referring to her presence. I concluded that he had no concerns about confidentiality since he had arranged for us to meet with his wife present.

In each interview I began by describing the purpose of the interview and the its potential general direction, and emphasised their right to end the interview at any time if they wished to. Two participants were in tears at times during their interviews, but both wanted to continue when I offered to end the interview.

I clarified that I was recording and would transcribe the interview as research data. None of them expressed concerns about my use of their material, though a number said that they would like to see what I had written.

I sent copies of my transcript to one respondent who he found it difficult to put his thoughts into writing and felt that he had expressed things well in the interview, and to another, a lecturer, who wanted to consider how she came across.

I did not consider that there was any problem of trust or reciprocity with any participant, or any of them were at risk as a result of our interview. The most reciprocal relationship was with Francis, where each of us interviewed the other in turn. I felt grateful to the participants, but often they commented that they had benefitted from being listened to and formulating their thoughts and experience.

If knowledge belongs to the subject as much as to the researcher, Alexandrov (op. cit.: 42-3) questioned whether the researcher is exploitative if he keeps his findings from his subject, but concluded that this would be justified by the researcher’s concern for the subject’s well-being. Humans are emotional, and avoid painful learning by mobilizing defences, protecting us from potentially distressing 'truth' about ourselves.

Hollway and Jefferson (2013: 78-9) raised concerns about power in the relationship. To deal with this in their research they identified themselves as university researchers, educated, employed and middle-class, unlike their participants, seeing such differences as inevitable and necessary to understand.
Potentially, power can be used beneficially. If they were being thought of as knowledgeable, it could have an emotional impact when they understood and sympathized with the participants.

Beedell (2009: 107-90) treated class as a power and ethical issue between interviewer and respondent. In an interview with a woman with strong working-class roots, she felt a middle-class background made it harder for her participants to trust her, so she felt drawn into disclosing parts of her own life in order to establish trust. Gilmour (2009: 131-2) also considered the ethics of the power of the interviewer. He or she is responsible for the interview, is presumed to know what to do, and invites the participants to lay themselves open to being judged. Yet 'the respondents were in a position of power in choosing what and how much knowledge to provide me with'. She also questioned whether she condoned racism by remaining silent when respondents were spontaneously honest with her.

These sorts of ethical issues did not arise in my research interviews. As a middle-class researcher myself, I was mainly interviewing middle class, professional participants. A participant from a working-class background spoke freely and said that she enjoyed talking about herself. Overt class issues did not arise with her or the other less middle class participant, and neither displayed any issues regarding class difference. Neither did I detect any clear differences between the responses of female and male participants. I accept that in some cases there were transference issues connected with my researcher role, which can be seen as to do with authority rather than power, but in general, power issues did not arise.

The principle of informed consent is central to the ethics of qualitative interviewing and implies that the participant receives the information they need in order to decide whether to take part. Hollway and Jefferson (2013: 79-80) decided that they could not inform participants in advance what a psychosocial interview would be like, as it could only be discovered through experience, and warned against prejudicing the research by signalling what the researchers expected. They concluded that their participants decided whether to participate more because of their feelings about the researchers than on the information they were given. They concluded that research ethics should be based on guarding against harm, honesty, sympathy and respect, rather than the principle of informed consent. I agree that informed consent cannot protect a participant from describing and becoming upset about painful emotional experiences. Nicholls (2009: 183) described how, 'when a participant became “emotional” any offer I made of changing the topic or even switching off the recording device was dismissed or ignored'. Both times this happened, as described above, I felt that the participant was perfectly accepting of her distress, and I had no ethical concerns.
The confidentiality of data that participants provide is crucial in the research process. I made all my participants fully aware that their material would be anonymized and then used in a PhD thesis. I have had no anxieties about this level of confidentiality, and as indicated I sent two participants a transcript of the interview at their request. I feel some anxieties about sharing my analysis of their material with them, as I wonder how they may react to my valid and justified analyses of their interview data. I will inform them all when the PhD thesis is accepted, and offer to send it to them, and objectively I am confident about dealing with any objections they may have.

Clarke and Hoggett (2009: 20-2) suggested that it is important to avoid mis-re-presenting the respondent, not making the data fit preconceived ideas, but to present what is really important to the respondent. The duty of care for the participant includes recognizing the researchers’ own feelings. We may identify with this participant, but we need to avoid merging parts of ourselves with them.

Conclusions

The ‘social’ aspect of a psycho-social approach is complex, as there is no unified social, societal or sociological discipline, unlike psychoanalysis, so I have drawn on social surveys, social psychology, psychoanalytically inspired sociology and discourse-based ecological theory. As a result I may have gathered too much theoretical and methodological background. In thinking about a psycho-social analysis, I have at times found it hard to distinguish narrative and positioning, and affect and transference and counter-transference.

Qualitative and quantitative research approaches have different aims and methods. A qualitative approach seemed the best way to examine the manifold forms of denial of the need to mitigate climate change. A psycho-social approach attracted me because it claimed to illuminate understandings of people’s underlying unconscious motivation, which appealed to me as a trained and experienced psychoanalytic psychotherapist. As Devereux (1967: xvi-xvii) proposed, counter-transference is key to applying a psycho-social approach. My psychotherapy background has helped me to follow psycho-social research methodology, but it was essential for me to clarify key differences between psychotherapy and psycho-social research interviewing.

The psycho-social approach argues that the only valid form of knowledge is subjective, unlike the ‘pseudo-objectivity’ of quantitative knowledge. Counter-transference is a form of this subjectivity. A psycho-social approach is validated by reflexively testing the subjective repeatedly, the researcher’s constant re-examination of his or her findings by re-experiencing them and testing them for their
consistency and emotional validity, and by subjecting them to the outside scrutiny of supervisors and colleagues.

I have given an account of a psycho-social approach and shown how I have attempted to use it to generate research interview data, conforming as closely as possible to the FANI model. Generally, I felt that it was not hard to enable participants to establish their narratives, though as I indicated, I sometimes felt that this conflicted with maintaining a focus on the research topic, thoughts and feelings about climate change and the environment. There have been plenty of instances, as I have illustrated above, where what Hollway and Jefferson call ‘free association’ occurred in the interviews. I have felt at home with the interviewing process given my therapeutic background. Initially I found I was intervening more actively, as I would in a psychotherapeutic process, than a psycho-social approach requires. This was the only problem I experienced in separating psychotherapeutic and psycho-social processes. With my supervisor’s help I corrected this in subsequent research.

My difficulty in giving a reflexive account of my approach to analysing my research data has surprised me, but I believe it is explicable given my lack of interest in my internal world, arising from the kind of early life that I have described in section 8 above. Perhaps also my interviewing has become internalised and less consciously reflexive and therefore hard to identify and describe.

I have considered and described ethical issues arising from my research. My main unresolved issue concerns, not the data itself, but my anxiety about how my respondents’ might react to my analysis of their data. I will deal with this when the PhD is completed and they have access to it.

My main conclusion is that I have applied a psycho-social approach conscientiously and thoroughly in generating and analysing my research.

I investigated a range of options when planning my PhD, and Paul Hoggett’s interest in climate change, his psychotherapy training and practice and his expertise in a psycho-social approach decided me to apply to study with him. I am grateful to him for taking me on, to Judy Orme for joining as a second tutor and supervisor, and to Nigel Williams for taking over when Paul had to retire from the lead supervision role. Their informed and rigorous understanding and disciplined approach to my more eclectic tendencies combined with their openness and responsiveness has been indispensable and formative, I have felt well supported by our regular email and skype contact and face-to-face meetings. As well as my supervision, as indicated above I was grateful for my limited opportunities to present aspects of my data to the university PhD workshops and in talks to professional bodies.
Chapter 5: Two Case Studies

Introduction

In this chapter I compare two contrasting interviews, in order to bring out different aspects of denial and different thoughts and feelings about climate change and the environment. I seek to apply analyses of forms of denial, and of psycho-social, discourse and rhetoric approaches, cultural and allied theoretical approaches, and an ecological perspective. Although these different analytic frames overlap, I have done my best to avoid repeating illustrations from the interview data.

I first introduce my two participants, chosen because they are typical of the broad range of my participants, not because their thoughts and feelings are unusual or extreme. I present the main themes arising in their interviews, and the overall process of the two interviews.

I then provide an analysis of the forms of denial of climate change and of environmental problems that they each present in the course of their interviews. After that I attempt a psycho-social analysis, then a discourse and rhetoric analysis. I then apply an analysis from the different theoretical frames of: cultural theory and the values–beliefs–norms theory, Haidt’s moral psychology, Dryzek’s environmental discourses, and Schwartz’s values analysis. Chapter 3 above has explored the differences between these various analyses, their respective merits and their value in analysing engagements with climate change. I justify including all these approaches because they are overlapping and complementary, make useful comparisons and provide distinct insights; some may turn out to be more effective forms of analysis than others. I finish with an ecological analysis.

The participants

In this section I introduce the two participants, and outline the main themes of the two interviews, and will provide more detailed interview vignettes and analyses later in this chapter.

Francis

Francis and I met in his well-used, book-lined academic’s university office. He impressed me as a firm and decisive university teacher and writer who would be challenging if necessary. He was easy to
interview, cooperative and responsive, as he spoke at length, freely, frankly, thoughtfully and honestly about his view of his life and climate change. It was an interesting and enjoyable interview with a clear sense of narrative.

He presented himself as dispassionately amoral on a social level, but personally committed at an immediate, family level. In the interview he consistently positioned himself in a sceptic position as regards climate change, and took a reflexive view of himself, continually questioning his sincerity and emphasising his ‘life-style greenishness’. His focus was on his immediate concerns and he disregarded the impact of climate change on the rest of the world and future generations.

Main themes and the interview process

The interview circled around the significance of his family, particularly his father’s and his wife’s scientific backgrounds and his wife’s work. Throughout the interview he showed his awareness of climate change but remained sceptical and detached about the subject. He repeatedly referred to his ‘hard scientist’ father’s influence, his importance in his life, hard science, and contempt for and discrediting of green arguments.

He then described his own ‘greenish’ position, which is confined to advancing his own personal interests and which costs him nothing, and his contradictory behaviour in flying – despite feeling he ought not to, for the sake of his children’s future. He was openly much influenced by his wife’s demanding role as a fossil fuel company executive.

He said he is cynically aware that climate change will affect people in other countries much more gravely than in this country. He then described attitudes to energy consumption and life generally in Houston, Texas. I asked him if he and his wife discuss climate change, and he took up a position of explicit climate change denial.

He emphasised, reflected on and ironically saw a gap between what he ought to and what he actually does think or feel, and contrasted his ‘greenish’ attitude with his accepting his wife’s and his own flying. When I asked specifically about his political position and his wife’s work, he defended his wife’s company, and took an individualist political stance.

I returned to his father’s environmental scepticism, which led him to describe people’s changing views of different scientific disciplines over time. As regards the attacks on the University of East
Anglia (UEA) climate scientists, he defended the way academics defend and promote their own discipline.

Arising from his wife’s work and his own research interests, he argued for individual responsibility for climate change mitigation, and the efficiency of the market, and suggested that ‘political realism’ prevents government from taking decisive action. He described his children’s advantage as regards future climate change, but disavowed any moral justification for his position, and avowed support for market-based solutions to political problems, suggesting that inequality is inevitable.

There was a strong contrast between his recognition of his father’s influence and his struggle to identify how his mother has affected him. He proceeded to think about what sort of parents and grandparents they, and his parents-in-law, have been. He described his mother’s apparently successful treatment for cancer, which has brought up his parents’ denial of their mortality and his awareness of his own.

The themes of his presentation – i.e. climate change scepticism, individual responsibility and the market – were largely coherent, and he appeared to espouse a disregard for morality other than in relation to his immediate family. The process can be seen as a deliberate and self-aware dialectic between the influence his parents and wife have had upon him, his ‘greenishness’ and his challenges to environmentalism, founded in an adherence to political ‘realism’ and the market.

Holly

We met in Holly’s Georgian terraced house. Her semi-retired banker husband came home during our meeting but played no part in it. She talked freely about herself, but I felt there was a slight edge of anxiety under the surface, in one or other of us or in us both. She was a rewarding and responsive participant, with interesting perspectives and contradictions.

She tended to see both sides of any issue, which she attributed to the diplomatic environment of her upbringing. It left me feeling she was slightly elusive. She presented both sides of many questions such as climate change, growing use of carbon energy in the developing world, and the cutting down of the Amazon rainforest. Yet she was passionate about waste and recycling, a trait her parents had transmitted to her and her siblings. The transcript gives the impression of rapport between us, which contradicts my memory of feeling careful and slightly uneasy during the interview.
Main themes and the interview process

The process of her interview can be seen as a dialectic between general perspectives and personal feelings. Her father worked for intergovernmental organisations in Geneva, so her upbringing was international and lacking national identity. She saw herself as a diplomatic person, and less interested in politics except locally. From her upbringing in the international diplomatic environment of Geneva, she moved through recycling, to environmentalism and flying, and thence to education. She touched on key themes of her misgivings about flying, and her sense that only personal experience convinces her rather than general issues.

She summarised neutrally some positions about climate change; she reserved judgment about this, given her lack of scientific knowledge, and concluded that there is ‘a period of’ climate change, suggesting a foreseeable end. She implied the right of, presumably, developed countries to allow or forbid aspects of development in developing countries. She questioned whether environmental concern is a luxury, unaffordable if you are poor, implicitly questioning her own position. She suggested that concern for climate change mainly derives from personal experience. She favoured energy self-sufficiency, but did not try to understand the economics and hoped a political momentum will emerge.

She came to her passionate commitment to recycling, which was in contrast to her non-committal approach to climate change, her diplomatic stance perhaps influenced by her father. She described her delight in actual teaching but her dislike of the academic exam-grade machine. She then talked about her voluntary work in a local primary school. She was enthusiastic about helping children to learn to read. She was concerned about the absence of environmental exposure in children’s lives, given how important being out of doors is for her, and their lack of a wider perspective, including climate change. She tried to encourage their interest in the natural world, bringing conkers and beach ‘hag stones’ into school. She explained how difficult is to adapt Victorian school buildings along environmental principles.

Then she spoke of her enthusiasm for being involved with the natural environment. She knew she flew too much, and saw it as her being spoiled – being able to because she has enough money to, comparing herself implicitly with her her ‘violently vegetarian’ sister-in-law and partner who have decided against flying and travel only by rail and boat. She knew that she could be more informed and active, but she was only activated by local, not global issues. She tried to avoid driving, but she ‘wickedly’ flew to Canada to ski and heli-ski. She thought she could have been more informed and active, but was clear that she didn’t want to be an activist.
She believed that human creativity would find solutions to whatever problems emerge, since previous generations overcame great challenges. She saw her generation as lucky, and was concerned for younger people with no education, home of their own, or work. She hoped that a caring society will provide adequately for them, disliked ‘doom and gloom’ predictions and ‘moaning and groaning’, and believed that people should be responsible for their actions.

She was divided between a modified environmentalism that included avoiding car travel where possible and recycling, and a blithe disregard for the environmental damage caused by air travel and heli-skiing.

**Denial**

In this section I will compare the different ways Francis and Holly expressed forms of denial of the need for action on climate change and the environment.

In Chapter 2, I examined the psychoanalytic concept of denial – and the distinction which is made between negation and disavowal – and forms of denial described from sociological perspectives. This section compares the differing forms of denial employed by my two participants. Negation implies that what is repressed becomes conscious, so the repressed material is accepted, but its significance is minimised. By contrast, in disavowal, different parts of the personality can believe opposite things at the same time and depressive real world anxieties can be avoided. Following Cohen (see Chapter 3), almost all of the examples of disavowal that follow fall within what he calls interpretive denial, where potentially embarrassing or discreditable circumstances are given an unmerited favourable interpretation, and many could be seen as the denial of responsibility.

Francis adhered to a largely detached, unemotional and morally neutral position throughout, while Holly was emotionally more expressive, committed herself to ethical positions and expressed conflicting and contradictory feelings openly.

**Negation**

Both Francis and Holly sanctioned their non-environmental behaviour by employing forms of negation that largely removed their emotional and ethical impact. For them both, important aspects of their ways of life depended on being able to continue negating their non-environmental behaviour.

Francis was neutral about change and positioned himself as dispassionate about himself. His intellectually coherent position was carefully worked out and settled. He avowed a pro-environmental,
uncommitted ‘green’ position, that doesn’t cost anything, consistent with his own self-consciously hypocritical environmentalism, yet he admitted an implied anti-environmentalism in his benefitting from his wife’s work which involved frequent flying:

I suppose we do do things about it, but usually things that don’t cost us anything; so, it doesn’t really cost us anything not to drive, because we don’t want to drive; erm, er; it does not cost me anything to be insistent on not flying because I don’t like flying and because I know that our lifestyle depends on [his wife’s name] continuing to fly a huge amount for her work.

His being vaguely aware of detrimental effects on developing countries, improbable in a highly educated and aware man, seemed a clear example of negation, treating facts as unimportant:

I have a, I suppose a vague awareness that there will be certain countries – Bangladesh, parts of Africa – that will be particularly hard hit by climate change.

Holly was emotionally expressive and openly ambivalent in admitting, but not justifying, the anti-environmental nature of her frequent flying and that she did it because she could afford to and liked doing it:

Bad on flying, and I know that; we do, and do carbon offsetting, erm, which is just a conscience-assuaging thing … No, we fly much too much; erm, that is, I don’t know what that is, that is being spoiled, having the money to do it and doing it.

Francis was neutral and detached about environmentalism and climate change activism. However, while Holly was generally optimistic about her life generally, and particularly about climate change, there was an undercurrent of doubt and her impatience might have disguised some anxiety. Both Francis and Holly could be seen as negating real threats from climate change. Holly put it like this:

I don’t like negativity, I don’t like people moaning and groaning, I haven’t got much patience, actually … I don’t like doom and gloom predictions, although I may think, arggh [a noise suggesting fear or anxiety], there is probably some truth in what they are saying.

I describe theories about catastrophes resulting from unmitigated climate change in Chapter 3. Francis was superior and detached regarding historical threats of disasters that had not materialised. This was reminiscent of the Peter Cook sketch described in Chapter 1.

I am very aware that kind of apocalyptic thinking was a big thing in British political life in the Seventies, which meant, oh, you know, fears of some kind of breakdown of order, but also the early stages of the green movement, and I think that tied sometimes into this kind of apocalyptic thinking; erm, obviously one of the things about being a historian is you tend to be sceptical about apocalyptic thinking because you are aware that the apocalypse has been anticipated so many times.
Holly referred to actual past crises where people felt desperate, and believed that people had survived them satisfactorily:

I suppose I have a general, possibly misplaced sort of optimistic outlook; I am definitely a glass-half-full person, and people will sort it, things will get better; erm, I like to think we are quite a resourceful, the human, humans are quite resourceful, sort of, we find ways around things; erm, I am sure in the past people have felt desperate about how life was going to be for their children and grandchildren and we seem to have sorted it out all right.

I have found little survey evidence of a feeling of responsibility towards future generations to avoid catastrophic climate change (see Chapter 10). Both Francis and Holly could be thought of as negating the impact of climate change on our descendants. Francis felt detached and unconcerned about the fate of future generations beyond a certain point in time and discounted the problem by weighing it against the question of inequality:

There must come a point at which generations in the future become increasingly abstract to you, and you don’t, er, you don’t care about them in the same way.

As illustrated above, Holly also found it difficult to think beyond her putative grandchildren’s generation.

Although the overwhelming majority of climate scientists accept the reality of anthropogenic climate change (see Chapter 1), positions taken about climate science by scientists who are not expert in climate continue to be used defensively. Francis’s father’s and his wife’s scientific backgrounds, and his own university colleagues, inclined him towards a scepticism about climate change:

My father is a physicist, so I have been brought up with, er, a with a respect for hard science, although I am not a hard scientist myself, er, and I can remember, er, my father being rather contemptuous of, er, kind of early green arguments.

[His wife] was in [a university department of earth sciences] for several years … [which] was working on climate change, so issues about very long-term climate change were something that concerned them. And obviously, if you work on fossilised dinosaurs, then very long-term climate change is part of your intellectual outlook.

Holly generally accepted climate science, although she was attracted to news items that negated it, which perhaps provided some relief and allowed climate change mitigation to be put off:

You then hear about people that don’t believe this at all, don’t you? There are complete naysayers about this; and I did hear something quite interesting on the radio, probably two years ago, which was saying that actually there is just a long-term up and down in the, in the temper–, in the temperature of the earth and that we are simply going through a, a swing one way at the moment and we should not think that therefore that it is, erm, that it’s a crisis at all. I don’t know enough about it to judge.
Unlike Francis, Holly took considerable satisfaction in acting pro-environmentally:

I get a warm fuzzy feeling when I go to the dump; I did it at the weekend with bags and bags of leaves, and as I, as you leave the dump it says, last year we recycled – and again I can’t remember numbers – 365,000 tonnes of, erm, household waste; keep it up and lets do more. I feel yes, good, well done people of [a North London borough] – [she laughs]; I’m a simple soul really, I am much better at dealing with that than with, erm, what is happening out in space. Ozone layers or whatever.

Disavowal

Francis was not aware of discussion of climate change in Texas or nationally in the USA, in spite of massive and vitriolic controversy over the issue there: an example of disavowal and turning a blind eye (Steiner 1985) to what is actually happening. This would correspond to Cohen’s category of literal denial, denial of the facts:

I do not remember anybody ever discussing climate change in Texas; indeed I cannot remember any discussion in America, even in kind of national press.

He also eliminated the moral impact of his actions,

I have, for example, at times in my life flown a great deal, which I understand to be more environmentally damaging than driving a car; erm; and, erm, the thing that I feel probably ought to have changed my attitude – I can’t say has had a huge effect on my attitude.

or the actions of his wife’s corporation:

Part of what I think of as the rather unfair demonisation of [his wife’s company], er, is the assumption, I mean, that, erm, er – it is rather like being an arms dealer, you know, making arms dealers responsible for war rather than soldiers, er, in that oil companies simply produce things that other people ask them to produce, erm, that there is – oil companies themselves seem to me to probably be slightly more conscious of the potential damage this is doing than the general population.

His detached and implicit indifference regarding climate change and the environment obviated any need to take action about climate change:

I described my own position as being hypocritical in that I like being green in ways that don’t actually damage my own lifestyle.

Holly’s disavowal took the form described in Chapter 2, that people don’t feel involved or concerned about environmental damage unless they have direct experience of it. This could be seen as on the margin between negation and disavowal, as it involved an element of splitting:
I don’t know that you can really internalise it until you try it yourself; erm; until you care about something that is going horribly wrong – if you, if you see seabirds covered in oil on a beach somewhere near where you live, all of a sudden it means something to you personally.

Social context

There are wide variations in the degree to which people were, or acknowledged having been, influenced by family and peer groups or interpretive communities (as explored in Chapter 3). Francis purported not to be affected by social and group influences regarding climate change, and suggested that taking action was entirely a matter of individual choice:

> Overwhelmingly obviously climate change could only be solved by individuals making decisions about their behaviour … people can simply make a choice: they are not going to drive cars, get on aeroplanes; erm; and, the fact is, we are not making that choice.

Yet he saw society rather than business as to blame for some things that people are unhappy about, contrary to his emphasis on individual choice. He identified two forms of interpretive community, or collective denial by others, which could be seen as projections of disowned attitudes of his. He perceived his colleagues as part of an interpretive community consisting of Guardian readers and public sector workers who knew nothing of the private sector:

> It strikes me about lots of, er, issues that my colleagues – and because, obviously, there is very much a kind of Guardian-reading public sector world in Britain, where people just don’t know anybody who works in the private sector – and I am struck by how frequently they kind of blame business for things that seem to me to be, in fact, to do with society.

Another example was the collective denial prevailing in Texas about the unacknowledged way that the society there depended on illegal Mexican immigrants:

> The famous phrase that is often used about Texan cities, if you ask them how many people live there, and they give you a figure, and then they say, ‘And do you include Mexicans?’ Because everybody knows there are huge amounts of illegal labour on which everything depends and it is being performed by illegal Mexican immigrants; erm, and so I suppose there is a kind of assumption that, that, things which, er, would be problematic if you thought about them are in practice just necessary for life.

Holly was explicitly influenced by her strongly environmentalist sister-in-law and her partner, and seemed to aspire to be seen as an environmentalist, but only within limits. Her feelings about them, and in a lesser way herself, illustrated the anxiety about the potential or actual sanction of ridicule applied to silence-breakers described in Chapter 3.

> I find that, erm, my insistence on using public transport wherever necessary – wherever possible rather – does slightly brand me the [North London] left-wing muesli- and lentil-eating brigade, so it is easy to mock; erm; I don’t mind being mocked – I think I am old
enough and I don’t care if people are laughing at me … But I think it might be off-putting to some people.

I admire [her sister-in-law and her partner] for it; it is further than I am prepared to go, but I think you find your own level on that.

Holly’s family had influenced her towards conservation. Though her father’s work for international organisations and the family’s social environment shaped her diplomatic stance, she was undiplomatically passionate about recycling and avoiding waste, deriving from her parents’ attitude. She had a strong emotional commitment to recycling which contrasted with her firm attachment to flying and heli-skiing, and her ambivalence about her environmentally committed relations:

Well we were not very political, we are not politicised; I feel more the diplomat’s daughter, I choose my words, I don’t – I always see both sides of a question. So that is like seeing both sides of the climate question. It is, I think, trying to understand it, not – I wouldn’t say I am sort of passionately in any, passionately involved in any politics really.

I’m a passionate, I’m a passionate recycler; erm I don’t think I do very much beyond that. Erm, I’m a passionate and very intolerant recycler: intolerant of other people who don’t. That’s where that gets me to.

How did that come about?
Erm, I don’t know, it just makes complete sense to me. I suppose it is, erm, I think I am almost, of the generation that had valued service enormously; I feel as though I ought to have belonged to them and, erm, I hate waste. I am knitting these scraps of wool, these leftover scraps of wool; I hate things being thrown away, and if they are going to be thrown away, at least throw them away properly so that they can be reused. I don’t think, I guess that is inherited, my parents are both like that, yes.

Both Francis and Holly were ambivalent about environmentalism and environmentalists, arising from a clash between concerns for the environment (which may have expressed conformity to social pressures) and their own personal needs. Francis did not refer directly to environmentalists, but saw his own environmental attitudes as self-interested and cynical:

There is a certain kind of, erm, er, what you might call, life-style greenishness, I suppose, so that, er, you can be green in a way that is obviously, er, comfortable, erm, that, er, morally comfortable, that makes you feel good, and which does not involve particular hardship.

Holly had mixed feelings about environmentalists. She teased her sister-in-law and her husband about their commitment to environmentalism:

I admire them for it; erm, and I sort of, I do it when I can; but I, I don’t drive in London at all, if I can possibly help it I don’t; I do quite elaborate things like, erm, today, I got the bus up Holloway Road, walked across Hampstead Heath, Tube out to West London, Tube back in, walked up from there, you know. I will do anything rather than drive, partly because, it has been made so difficult to park, which I approve of, erm, difficult and expensive; erm, so I, yes, so to come back to [her sister-in-law and her partner], I do admire them for it. I will joke about them; I think they, they take it in good humour, being laughed at a bit; and it goes with
violent vegetarianism, I am kind of on that boat too, I don’t eat very much meat; but, erm, they know that I love skiing, and I will fly to Canada and then go heli-skiing. It is wicked, terrible, for the environment, but I, that is what I like to do, so, I do it.

Holly refused to become involved in campaigning. She explained how only personal experience can make an environmental issue come alive for her:

I know that is not, I am helpless about it, but I know that I needn’t be, erm; I am sure I could get better informed, more active. Do I want to be a mover and a shaker in a, in a political pressure-group-making way? No, I don’t. I don’t want to put myself out there doing that at all; no; I campaign to have Residents Parking along this street because I was fed up with people parking here and going off, going down to the Tube and in doing that, you know, that’s the closest I will get to being a pressure-group maker; I don’t want to do it.

His family influenced Francis towards a sceptical, traditional scientific position. His father had influenced him considerably, based on his authority as a physicist. He had also been influenced by scientific fellow undergraduates and by his wife whose PhD was on palaeontology and geology, reinforced by his dependence on his wife’s work for a fossil fuel corporation.

I describe some differences in how participants regard economic beliefs, differences and injustices and views about wealth and poverty in Chapter 7. Francis identified economic inequalities at an impersonal, global level, between individuals and between societies (illustrated above in 3. Denial a. Negation). But he concluded that it would be too unpopular to do anything about them, quoting the impossibility of banning cars within city centres, and avowing faith in market forces as a means for distributing resources:

The reason why I think markets are useful are because they are transparent, so there is no messing around about what is being done, erm, and they are efficient, erm, and it seems to make people resent them because they resent the idea that rich people will have things that other people won’t do. Although my sense is that that’s how the world works.

Holly expressed more immediate and personal feelings. Sometimes she suggested that acting on climate concern could be a middle-class luxury, but she aspired to an environmental way of life:

I think a lot of, it’s a luxury, really, being – it’s often presented as a luxury being able to care about climate change, isn’t it? You say, if you’re poor, you can’t choose … erm; and I suppose, having lots of money I should be able to, to say, everything that I have done has been a choice; and I would like to say I had been that thoughtful; I am not sure I always have.

At other times she suggested that everybody should work part-time – ignoring how this might be unaffordable for many – which is on the margin between negation and disavowal:

I think, part-time working is, I think it’s the only way to work; I think everybody should do it. I think the, the, the skills you then develop in balancing part-time work, family life,
volunteering, doing things for free, giving your time away, erm, and having flexibility, so that you can drop everything if a crisis arises – which it always does, there always are, when you have got children and you have got elder, elderly family; you are always going to have to be doing things, and to just have time to do everything, such a luxury.

Holly expressed concern for young people without educational or material advantages, perhaps thinking about the future of the children in the school she is associated with. She hoped future generations would prosper, based on technological ingenuity and ‘fixes’, and for continuing principles of social justice, but she revealed an element of disavowal in saying she hoped all this was true:

Our children are very privileged children: they have very lucky backup – erm, how it feels to be a less privileged person who cannot get your foot on the property ladder, can’t get a job, hasn’t had the same education, advantages of good education, I think that is much tougher, but, I don’t, I try not to be pessimistic. I think, erm, you know, some people in every generation don’t really do very well and that is why we have a, the security net and a, erm, we are quite a caring society, I hope; erm, and the, those who do well I hope, don’t just do well for themselves, they do well and create wealth and prosperity and new inventions and advances and tug the rest of society along with them; I hope that’s true: pull the bottom of society up, catch them when they fall. Yes, I am optimistic, I try to be optimistic.

Psycho-social, discourse and rhetoric analysis

This section compares aspects of the way in which Francis and Holly presented themselves in the interviews and considers what insights into their underlying or unconscious feelings can be drawn. It draws on theoretical analyses outlined in Chapters 2, 3 and 4.

Psycho-social analysis

Transference

Francis manifested some potentially transferential feelings of being challenged and challenging. Holly seemed willing to comply and to satisfy me, but also to express a degree of authority over me, which could be transferences.

Francis’s transference to me was expressed immediately by challenging my methodology:

It’s a very challenging way to approach it; I’m sure it is a very good way.

When he suggested that a strictly environmental approach might be anti-egalitarian, he may have been defending himself and challenging my potentially left-wing position:

The, er, consequences of thinking about climate change could be politically unacceptable consequences for the left.
Regarding his father’s influence, he represented himself as psycho-dynamically aware of his reacting against, as well as being influenced by, his father:

   He is also a kind of, I don’t know, short, physically unimpressive person so, you know, if you want a physical thing, a certain kind of man, that driving would be part of it.

He disputed my softening something he had said, by putting it in a more black-and-white way, as if needing to challenge me, perhaps like with his father:

   He said, er, that people will do vastly less environmental damage if you leave them in Africa or Asia, if you leave them in poor countries.
   Looking very seriously at climate change involves, erm, a very complex set of value issues; it’s not, there’s no black-and-white in it at all.
   Well, I think there probably is black-and-white in it.

He several times defended his wife’s company from criticism, maybe defending himself because he partly felt implicated in the company’s activities.

He was not prepared for my question about his mother’s influence, and his response suggested a more difficult relationship with his father than with his mother:

   I am much closer to my mother than I am to my father, or at least, you know, I have a much more, kind of easy and intimate relationship.

I don’t think I would have either imitated he or reacted against her in the way that I did with my father.

Holly flattered me and praised me that I correctly analysed her but maybe she did not want me to do this:

   You correctly analysed me earlier as being someone that starts from the human scale.

She expressed her wish to satisfy what I was looking for:

   I’m not sure that that relates to climate change, but it is to do with the environment.

She responded diplomatically to my declaring a position:

   Economics is ruling the day, sort of thing and so, we can’t, we know, we can’t afford wind power or solar power or tidal power?
   I don’t know enough about it; it is definitely an argument, isn’t it.
Counter-transference

I think I was rather in awe of Francis, perhaps unconsciously reflecting his deferential and challenging feelings about his father. With Holly I felt I was being slightly careful and not entirely secure. Perhaps I was responding to her unconsciously communicated authority, combined with her defending herself against criticism for her non-environmental behaviour.

Positioning of self

Francis positioned himself as self-consciously reflexive, examining his own thought process, sceptical and self-disparaging, and hypocritical and morally detached, though engaged in family and professional life. This could have been to pre-empt my potential criticism. I illustrated his ‘lifestyle greenishness’ above (in 4. Social context). His detachment contradicted his more egalitarian support for Labour:

I am not sure I would kind of justify my position in moral terms at all.

He justified his support for the environmentally damaging aspect of his wife’s work because their way of life depends on it (illustrated above in 3. Denial a. Negation).

He repeatedly contrasted what his attitude ought to be with what it is. He seemed to ironically ridicule being ‘terribly worried’, perhaps pre-empting criticism of his lack of concern for his children’s and the world’s future:

I ought to be terribly worried about what [his children’s] long-term future will be. Professional concerns, financial concerns, health concerns – all these things would come a long way above worrying about climate.

He several times qualified his own statements both about himself and about his wife’s corporate employer, perhaps to convey his awareness of his subjectivity; he equivocally hedged his statement of his green sympathies:

I suppose, I mean, erm, I feel, that I am, I am talking about lots of things in a rather strange way.

Holly positioned herself as the oldest child of diplomatic parents, shaped by their post-war attitude to waste, and destined for teaching by virtue of her authority as the oldest and ability with languages. She defiantly positioned herself as privileged, but her being able to afford to fly a lot and act anti-environmentally, work voluntarily, and keep two homes, contrasted with her concern for
disadvantaged children and environmental damage, and with her enthusiasm for outdoor activities and the natural world.

She described feeling virtuous about recycling, yet she undermined this with ironic self-deprecation, given her self-awareness, her intense feelings about recycling and waste and her evident intelligence and competence (mentioned above in 3. Denial a. Negation).

Social pressures and perspectives

With Francis, I did not take up whether he conformed to or resisted the social pressures in Texas to go in for ‘quite extraordinary energy expenditure’:

We lived in Texas for two years which, er, is obviously a world of quite extraordinary energy consumption, erm, so air conditioning, cars, aeroplanes, would all be seen as, you know, absolutely necessary things.

He disregarded social and cultural pressures, yet acknowledged pressures to conform in accepting what would be problematic if thought about:

I suppose there is a kind of assumption that, that, things which, er, would be problematic if you thought about them are in practice just necessary for life.

He illustrated this by distinguishing between conscious denial and social avoidance:

I think it, it, I think people don’t need to deny it, in that my sense is that it is not raised as an issue to the same extent.

This is an example of the operation of an interpretive community, and Zerubavel’s denial through silence as I describe in Chapter 3.

He twice qualified his wife’s company’s responsibility for CO₂ emissions:

It could be seen, I suppose, as particularly responsible.

He projected paranoid feelings onto his wife’s company, seeing it as demonised, and implying that fossil fuel companies, like arms dealers, are morally neutral and produce what other people ask them to (illustrated above in 3. Denial b. Disavowal).

In spite of Holly’s admiration for her environmentalist in-laws, she evidently belonged to an interpretive community which proscribed talking about unwelcome issues, for fear of being framed as
lecturing her friends (Zerubavel’s socially constructed denial, see Chapter 3). She tried to sustain her optimism, despite her anxieties that things were not as good as she would hope:

When I said to her that you could have walked across the heath in half an hour, and she said, ‘Oh, I love walking, but it is so much more practical coming by car’ – but it isn’t, but it isn’t, and I didn’t lecture about it, and maybe I should have lectured her; I just thought, well, you know, that’s the way you do it.

Like Francis she defended her spouse against criticism for frequent flying:

He was flying for work more days than not; for many years, erm, and that is just part of his investment banking culture, that’s, everybody travels. I say, ‘It’s extraordinary, you are in telecoms, can you not speak to one another?’ ‘It isn’t a substitute,’ he will say, ‘not a substitute for actually meeting people, erm, actual human contact.’

She admired her environmentalist in-laws and thought they didn’t mind being laughed at. She expressed her ambivalence with her rhetorically oxymoronic ‘violent vegetarianism’. In her feelings about her sister- and brother-in-law (illustrated above in 4. Social context), she showed how environmentalists, especially close family members, can influence others by example.

She questioned whether environmental concern is a luxury for well-off people (illustrated above in 4. Social context). In claiming that she is exceptional and ridiculed, she employed rhetorical *reductio ad absurdam*, portraying herself as part of a ‘left-wing muesli- and lentil-eating brigade’ (see above, 4. Social context).

She made an unconscious link between climate and catastrophe in referring to 9/11:

The temperatures recorded in the five days or six days following 9/11, when all planes were grounded, were entirely different.

She assumed her privilege, and ignored social and economic realities, in optimistically representing the complex problems of the developing world and suggesting that everybody could work part-time (illustrated above in Social context):

You have to even this out and find ways of making it possible for those countries to prosper, erm, and, and probably by actually, I don’t know how you do it, but by trade businesses or something.

Her optimism was tentative, and she implicitly questioned whether we have ‘sorted it out’ and the idea of ‘a caring society’ with her qualifying ‘quite’, and ‘I hope’. She might have been resolving her inner doubt by projecting it onto others and dismissing it as ‘moaning’. She disliked dire warnings,
while reluctantly accepting part of their truth (illustrated above in the section above entitled. Negation):

I have a general, possibly misplaced sort of optimistic outlook.

We are quite a caring society, I hope … I hope that’s true … I try to be optimistic.

She advanced but then questioned the theory of wealth trickling down to the less well-off (illustrated above in Social context).

**Emotional issues**

Francis sustained an emotionally detached tone throughout, apart from his complex feelings about his father and uncomplicated affection for his mother. It did not emerge what he, an intelligent, self-reflective person, cared deeply about. It may be that he was unwilling to expose deeper feelings in just one meeting, partly perhaps as a defence against anxiety.

Holly freely expressed her complex feelings about climate change and environmentalism. She was self-questioning and self-reflective, balancing contradictory feelings over environmental issues, yet accepting herself and her place in the world. There perhaps was some underlying deprivation in her caution, her sense of not belonging and her identification with disadvantaged children. My counter-transference of caution might have been an unconscious response to this.

Never quite belonging anywhere.

I was lucky being the first and things got handed down from me to the others.

What I like, is actually being involved with the pupils – with their families, trying to get a fair deal for them.

As the oldest, she had had to be responsible, accepting the power implied in her position, and needing to be in charge:

I had always been bossy; I used to line up my toys, and then I lined up my younger siblings, and taught them. It was pretty much a foregone conclusion.

She wanted the pupils to be aware of the wider world and was concerned about their lack of contact with the natural world, yet she herself only connected with things she could directly experience:

They have to try and find these places on the map.
Until they have a vision of themselves as part of a bigger world they can’t think, feel particularly engaged.

She mimicked a boy sympathetically, showing her identification:

I remember asking one little boy I was reading with, because I do reading at the school, asking one little boy ‘Where did you go? What did you do over half term?’ It was about a year ago [excited voice]: ‘Oh it was really exciting, it was really exciting, can’t remember, can’t remember, what it was called, but oh, it was so exciting!’ I said ‘OK, calm down, when it comes back to you, tell me.’ And he went, ‘We went to, we went to, Argos!’ That was it. That was the pinnacle, that was the thrill.

She was split between her judicious and her passionate sides:

I, wouldn’t say I am sort of passionately in any, passionately involved in any politics really, except when they get very very local. Then I get excited.

She acknowledged a split in her between opting out of a more general moral discourse with an individualistic position, and a universal moral position:

I think you find your own level on that … having said that, as I said at the beginning, I am hugely intolerant of people who can’t be bothered to recycle.

She was sometimes outraged, and she advocated being responsible for oneself, but with flying and heli-skiing she ignored her carbon emissions:

I think sometimes one should be morally outraged, erm; it is too easy not to be: just look away.

I go blithely on flying, but I do try to offset it. Erm, I think, I think I am more conscious than I used to be.

She was divided in being horrified but unmoved by statistics, and felt that only personal experience changes people’s attitudes to climate change and otherwise. This conformed to research findings reported in Chapter 2 that people are more interested in global warming when directly affected. She was explicitly guilty about flying and CO₂ discharge, but she justified this by saying that this is what she ‘likes’, an example of Norgaard’s ‘environmental privilege’, described in Chapter 3. Her use of the word ‘spoiled’ in relation to flying, described above in 3. Denial a. Negation, implied being unconsciously aware of spoiling the environment. She illustrated the effect of personal experience with the example of seabirds covered in oil referred to above (in 3. Denial b. Disavowal):

I can be horrified by statistics, erm – about global warming, or deforestation, or acid rain, or whatever it is, erm – but I can’t actually, that doesn’t motivate me.
I will fly to Canada and then go heli-skiing. It is wicked, terrible, for the environment, but I, that is what I like to do, so, I do it.

There was a contradictory split between mocking her more extreme in-laws when others couldn’t take being mocked:

I don’t care people laughing at me … But I think it might be off-putting to some people.

Her recycling passionately stood for some core values and connected her with her parents’ generation:

I’m a passionate and very intolerant recycler.

It just makes complete sense to me.

I think I am almost, of the generation that had valued service enormously.

She honestly struggled over careless environmental choices, given her secure financial position (illustrated above in Social context).

Discourse and rhetoric analysis

Analogies and metaphors

Francis’s analogies were political, religious or ethical, including the arms dealer analogy applied to his wife’s corporation (referred to in 3. Denial b. Disavowal):

Is a bit like Stalinist purges, you do become aware that you have a limited lifespan.

It is rather like religion where, you know, people have an idea about what the afterlife might be, but it doesn’t necessarily have much impact on the day to day life.

It strikes me as a bit like nuclear war … it was never a matter that kept me awake at night.

He used very few metaphors. The ones he did use shed light on his internal world, even when they (green, prognosis, cutting edge, environmental footprint) were conventional and common currency. Some of them had a hard, bleak and mechanistic quality:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metaphor</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘moral panic’</td>
<td>when something is felt to be a threat to existing values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘green’, ‘greenish’</td>
<td>suggesting political and social environmental values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘hard science’</td>
<td>suggests real science as opposed to humanities, history or social sciences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘it is demonised’</td>
<td>he applies hyperbole and <em>reductio ad absurdum</em> to discredit arguments against his wife’s company, which he sees as represented as demonic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘they did seem to have an extraordinarily bleak prognosis’</td>
<td>he applies medical terminology to future international affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘she had fired up her computer’</td>
<td>like starting a steam engine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘scientists have cutting edge disciplines’</td>
<td>this suggests their ruthlessness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘scientists will always be flirting with things’</td>
<td>this suggests something unexpectedly frivolous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘environmental footprint’</td>
<td>a modification of ‘carbon footprint’, expressing an individual’s or organisation’s volume of CO₂ discharge</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Holly used metaphors quite sparingly, but arresting:

International Baccalaureate guinea pigs.

A bit pooh poohish.

She looked at me absolutely daggers.

The emperor in my classroom.

A complete bookworm.

In her ‘polar bear’ metaphor, ‘ambassador’ seemed associated with her diplomatic origins, ‘cuddly’ suggested how dangerous animals have been sentimentalised in order to change perceptions:

Polar bears, yes. Maybe that is how you have to do it. They are the cuddly ambassadors for climate change.

She also used many conventional metaphors related to macro-economic, personal and non-economic matters:

Too much opinion stacked up.

Some people are time rich and some are very time poor.

You have to do, have, a carrot at the end.
It is not the trigger, for making me do anything.

She used oxymorons confidently, particularly in connection with sustainable and alternative living. There might sometimes have been an element of something between irony and ridicule about them:

A passionate recycler.
Violent vegetarianism.
A fanatical bike rider.
Radiators blasting.

She used a rhetorical question to reject an activist role:

Do I want to be a mover and a shaker in a, in a political pressure-group-making way? No, I don’t.

**Cultural theory, Haidt, Dryzek, Schwartz**

In this section I analyse Francis’s and Holly’s cultural positions, using cultural theory, Haidt’s moral psychology, Dryzek’s environmental discourses and Schwartz’s cultural comparatives approach, which I describe in Chapter 3.

Francis mixed a ‘survivalist’ (Dryzek 1997) discourse in supporting green measures, with a stronger ‘economic rationalist’ (‘leave it to the market’) position, while also being shaped by ‘administrative rationalism’ and a reliance on authorities, both governmental and intellectual. These positions could equally well be expressed as egalitarian, hierarchic and individualist.

Cultural theory highlights his respect for hierarchy, respecting his father’s ‘hard science’, his wife’s role in a large corporate bureaucracy and his own position in an intellectual and organisational hierarchy; and his individualism, in his commitment to a market perspective, overruling his theoretical egalitarianism:

I suppose having a wife who works for a big corporation does mean that I am much less likely to blame the corporations.

The kind of things that scientists would say to each other when I was young – which was all rather kind of macho, dismissive – sometimes I suspect related to the way in which different scientific disciplines related to each other. So my father would I think have been perhaps rather contemptuous of biology at one time, as a soft subject.

He’d be very much a post-war, you know, the man in Whitehall knows best, type person.
His sceptical view of academics had a hierarchist but also individualist, self-enhancing quality, as well as some sense of the ‘Fairness/cheating’ polarity:

The discrediting of climate science, which I haven’t followed very closely.

[Of the ‘Climategate’ affair involving UEA climate scientists]: I can’t say it shocked me terribly, or made me think that I would change my view.

He was strongly individualist, self-enhancing, and supportive of the ‘liberty of the right’ in his own values and ethical positions, his moral neutrality illustrated above (under ‘Positioning of self’, in the section above entitled Psycho-social analysis).

His clear views on the benefits of market processes and the failings of communist regimes had qualities of individualism in cultural theory terms, Dryzek’s economic rationalism, Schwartz’s self-enhancing hedonism, and support for Haidt’s ‘right to be left alone’, but he disclaimed complete faith in the market:

I wouldn’t say I am enthusiastic for the free market so much as that, erm, I just have quite a lot of faith that it works in certain sorts of things.

There is nowhere where environmental damage is more striking than in post-communist countries.

I am a very green-influenced voter; but obviously, in this context, self-interest and principle would tie together, because if you are not a car driver, it is obviously enormously in your interests to invest in public transport.

He actively undermined the idea of governmental action on climate change by a reduction ad absurdum argument, that it would be impossible in a democratic society. He set reducing environmental damage from flying against democratising travel through cheap air travel, such that individualism and self-enhancement overruled self-transcendence in Schwartz’s terms, and the liberty to be left alone overrode liberty for ordinary people in Haidt’s terms:

It would be possible, for example, simply to say, it is illegal to drive a car within 8 miles of the centre of a city. It would be absolutely simple to do; absolutely impossible in our society … It would undoubtedly produce riots in the street and the overthrow of any government that proposed it in any democratic country.

This comes down partly to distribution of resources, doesn’t it, in that, erm, er, air travel is obviously amongst other things democratising travel; erm, and, erm, in practice I assume that, erm, even the kind of travel that has the smallest environmental footprint, would, er, would still be damaging.
The idea that people could be persuaded to adopt a simpler and environmentally friendly way of life was egalitarian in cultural theory terms and self-transcendent in Schwartz’s terms, in sharp contrast with his ethically neutral, market-based individualism as in cultural theory.

You could say, well there is actually an enjoyable life, which would consist of, you know, spending more time growing your own vegetables and cycling, and spending less time moving around.

Holly manifested sharply contrasting aspects of her personality, in cultural theory terms, in her hierarchism and individualism, contrasting with her egalitarianism. Hierarchically, she respected scientific authority, the potential for government action, and her own firm authority in the classroom and as a school governor:

I don’t know enough about it to judge that … I am not a scientist.

It is within the power of governments I think to change the, erm, taxes on things and to skew things with grants or with taxes so that, you know, developing tidal power becomes economic.

t is possible to be friendly and outgoing but still keep discipline; that is, sort of, erm, there is always a balance.

Individually, she emphasised being affected by her own direct experience of seeing seabirds contaminated by oil (illustrated above in the section entitled. Disavowal), her independent authority within her own classroom, and her sense of entitlement.

There were elements of both self-transcendence, in her concern for the school, and self-enhancement in Schwartz’s terms, in her exercise of her authority (emphasis added):

I like being, you know, the emperor in my classroom: my classroom, this is how I run my classroom with my rules; erm, but once you have set the rules, once it is your classroom, and it is all accepted, you can do amazing things.

In feeling entitled to act non-environmentally, described above in Denial:. Negation, she would be claiming what Haidt describes as the liberty to be left alone:

I am horrified by the ozone layer and, but it doesn’t touch me in the way that, erm, a bit of wasteland being covered in litter does; I start from a smaller scale.

However in helping children to read, accepting that developing countries need to use energy to develop, her ‘passionate’ recycling (illustrated above in Social context) her partial environmentalism, and her concern for less privileged young people (illustrated above in Social context) she was
distinctly egalitarian in cultural theory terms, and in line with Haidt’s principles of care, liberty for the
vulnerable, and fairness:

I thought when I started this, erm, volunteer reading that children would feel that, erm, picked
out as useless, and needing extra tuition or below par, and they come running up to me – ‘Can
I read with you? Please can I read with you?’ – I want to be, to read to, so it is seen as a
privilege.

You can’t do that because you are damaging the environment. But this, this is their chance to
get rich so to a certain extent I can see that they regard that as unfair.

Her egalitarian admiration for her in-laws would fit with Dryzek’s green romanticism:

My sister-in-law acquiring her partner, who is fanatical about it, certainly made all of us in
the family slightly reassess ourselves.

Thus applying cultural theory, Haidt’s moral psychology, Dryzek’s environmental discourses and
Schwartz’s cultural analysis can highlight aspects of participants’ feelings and views and enhance the
overall analysis.

Three ecologies

In this section I apply Guattari’s conception of the three ecologies of mind, society and nature (which
I describe in Chapter 3) to Francis’s and Holly’s awareness of the three ecologies as interconnected.

Francis was environmentally aware of different kinds of destructive relationships with the
environment, in an environmentally damaged communist successor state and in environmentally
unconcerned Texas. He was vaguely aware of the effects of climate change on vulnerable societies,
taking an extreme individualist stance and disregarding the interrelatedness of the world. He argued
that geological time has witnessed huge variations of CO₂ in the atmosphere independent of humanity,
and that recently climate research has been distorted by research money being available. His interest
was restricted to a general perspective on the human impact on nature without a sense of
interrelationship between mind, society and the natural world:

We lived in Prague for a year while my wife was running the finances for [her company] in
the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic, and of course, er, there is nowhere where
environmental damage is more striking than in post-communist countries; so, it was always
said, but we never tried this out, that there were parts of the Czech Republic where, er, they
would have signs up saying you couldn’t light a cigarette, at certain points of atmospheric
pollution, because they seriously thought the air might catch fire; it sounds a very apocryphal
story, but, er, one was very, very aware of the environment pollution having been a big
problem.
We lived in Texas for two years which, er, is obviously a world of quite extraordinary energy consumption, erm, so air conditioning, cars, aeroplanes, would all be seen as, you know, absolutely necessary things.

I am cynically aware that climate change won’t have the kind of effects, I mean that its effects will be very disproportionate: it’ll hit some people much earlier and much worse than others, erm, and so, erm, I know that one of my colleagues, erm, works partly on an island off Bangladesh which will eventually sink, will sink in the near future, erm, and so I have a, I suppose a vague awareness that there will be certain countries – Bangladesh, parts of Africa – that will be particularly hard hit by climate change; and I have always assumed, perhaps complacently, that, erm, a middle-class person in England is, you know, probably – short of living up a Swiss mountain – is the second best place to be, perhaps, in terms of climate change.

Holly was individually, socially and pleasurably involved with the natural world, and felt that the children in her school needed greater contact with it, but she only had a qualified sense of connection between the individual, social and natural worlds. She mocked her sister-in-law and partner’s environmentalism (illustrated above in 4. Social context), anticipated herself being mocked, and was emotionally affected only by direct experience of damage to the natural world (as illustrated above in 3. Denial b. Disavowal). She wondered whether environmentalism is only possible for the well-off and is unaffordable for developing countries, and she kept her interest in the natural world and recycling separate from her pleasure and enjoyment in flying (illustrated above in 3. Denial a. Negation):

To me that’s such an important part of my life, is walking and being outdoors.

I feel very much that [the children in her school] don’t get enough access to the natural world.

I collect the conkers and I take them into school; actually fights break out because they are so keen to get conkers.

I don’t care people laughing at me … But I think it might be off-putting to some people.

It’s a luxury, really, being – it’s often presented as a luxury being able to care about climate change.

[Developing countries] can’t do that because you are damaging the environment. But this, this is their chance to get rich so to a certain extent I can see that they regard that as unfair.

Conclusions

In comparing data from interviews with Francis and Holly I have been able to apply the theoretical analyses described in Chapters 2 and 3 meaningfully. I have clarified and upheld the psychoanalytic distinction between negation and disavowal as illustrated in the interview data, and have demonstrated that it provides a useful analysis of their respective positions regarding climate change.
Francis and Holly did not obviously conform to any particular interpretive community, but it emerged that they were both conscious of and influenced by interpretive communities, particularly Holly. She admired her environmentalist in-laws but her oxymoronic ‘violent vegetarianism’ metaphor expressed her ambivalence. She seemed under pressure to conform to an interpretive community that forbade saying what others do not want to hear, for fear of being framed as lecturing them. Francis too seemed influenced by his father’s and wife’s scientific communities and his wife’s corporate cultural community.

There was credible evidence of a paternal transference in Francis’s approach to me, which may reflect his father’s influence in his approach to climate change. With them both, my counter-transferences may have been more significant than their transferences. I felt cautious with Holly, and in awe of Francis based on his academic standing and clear, authoritative position, maybe unconsciously connecting with his own – both deferential and challenging – feelings and views about his father. Knowing I was a psychotherapist, he may have represented himself as aware of his ambivalence towards his father. Perhaps with them both I reacted to a convinced authoritative stance that might conceal an undercurrent of denied anxiety, more evident in Holly’s case.

Francis’s self-aware ‘greenishness’ was in contrast with his parents’ and wife’s influence, his challenges to environmentalism and his adherence to political ‘realism’ and the market. His father’s and his wife’s scientific backgrounds and his wife’s work inclined him towards scepticism. He several times defended his wife’s company from criticism, and projected paranoid feelings onto it, seeing it as demonised. According to him, fossil fuel companies were morally neutral, like arms dealers: they simply produced what other people asked them to produce. He saw society rather than business as to blame for some things that people are unhappy about. He justified his support for his wife’s environmentally damaging work because they depend on it economically. He was rigorously – yet ironically – self-consciously reflexive and sceptical, representing himself as hypocritical and morally detached, and repeatedly contrasting how he ought to be with how he is. This might have betrayed an underlying anxiety and a defensive attempt to pre-empt criticism. He was emotionally detached and neutral throughout, apart from evincing his complex feelings about his father and uncomplicated affection for his mother. He seemed unconcerned about the suffering from climate change of people elsewhere in the world.

Holly positioned herself unselfconsciously as the oldest child. Shaped by her parents’ attitude, she was undiplomatically passionate about recycling and avoiding waste, connecting her with her parents’ generation. She seemed destined for a teaching career from the start, both from her authority and her linguistic ability.
She positioned herself defiantly as split between being privileged, flying frequently, acting anti-
environmentally, working voluntarily and keeping two homes; and her concern for disadvantaged
children, for environmental damage, and her love for the outdoors and the natural world. Her concern
for poorer families and children’s lack of contact with the natural world in a deprived area might
suggest that she identified with them. Holly generally reacted more spontaneously and more
ambivalently than Francis, and took contradictory positions over the environment and working part-
time. She expressed her feelings freely, which suggested her emotional availability and willingness to
consider different responses to climate change.

As regards their use of analogies and metaphors, Francis’s metaphors tended to be political or ethical,
whereas Holly coined interesting and sometimes oxymoronic phrases.

Applying cultural theory and other analyses of social value brought out elements in each of their
material that I might otherwise have overlooked. Francis’s attitudes and positions can be interpreted
as expressing a dynamic unresolved tension between hierarchic and individualist, self-enhancing, and
egalitarian, self-transcending attitudes, where the individualist repeatedly overcame the egalitarian
position. He positioned himself as denying and evading concern and responsibility for climate change.
Cultural theory analysis also brought out how Holly compartmentalised her egalitarianism from her
individualism and hierarchism. She was split between her judicious and her passionate sides,
sometimes outraged, but blithely flying and heli-skiing, advocating being responsible for oneself, yet
ignoring causing carbon emissions by flying. She accepted some responsibility for climate change,
and questioned whether acting on climate concern is a luxury, yet suggested that everybody should
work part-time, ignoring how this might be unaffordable for many.

The perspective of the three ecologies of mind, society and nature revealed Francis’s lack of feeling
for and interest in the environment. He was environmentally aware, having lived in an
environmentally damaged communist successor state, and in environmentally unconcerned Texas, and
conscious of the effects of climate change on vulnerable societies, but took an extreme individualist
stance, disregarding the interrelatedness of the world. Holly’s concern for disadvantaged children and
environmental damage, and her love for the outdoors and the natural world, expressed a more joined-
up perspective on mind, society and nature.

These comparisons illustrate the complexities and ambivalences that run through all my participants’
thoughts and feelings about climate change and the natural world.
Chapter 6: The Many Faces of Climate Change Denial

Introduction

This chapter is concerned with evidence of the denial of man-made climate change or the need to mitigate climate change, as manifested in my participants’ data. As indicated in Chapter 2, denial is a central and crucial part of a psychoanalytic understanding of human engagement with climate change and the environment. In Chapter 3 I consider a sociological view of denial, including the work of Cohen and Zerubavel, which emphasised conformity to social pressures to disregard socially inconvenient or disturbing matters, and Norgaard’s work, which showed how these pressures operated on thoughts and feelings about climate change and environmental damage. In this chapter I focus mainly on interviews with seven participants which, alongside those with Francis and Holly, reviewed in chapter 5, provide a good across-the-board survey of a variety of forms of denial. I have provided profiles of these participants in Appendix I. For each form of denial I have first quoted data from these participants, and then amplified it with data from other participants.

As outlined in Chapter 2, negation implies that repressed material is accepted, but its meaning is nullified. With disavowal, a split in the Ego allows two opposite beliefs to be held at the same time, so paranoid–schizoid and depressive anxieties can be systematically avoided.

The first section illustrates forms of negation, positions that participants take in relation to their social world, such as explicit disregard for the consequences of climate change, and deliberate, self-aware anti-environmental action. Negation has much in common with what Cohen describes as ‘accounts’ passed on by cultural transmission, and in particular forms of denial of responsibility.

The second section illustrates particular forms of disavowal. I treat my participants’ various expressions of dissociation as examples of disavowal. These include optimism; mania; agency and lack of agency, the capacity to take action and powerlessness; dissociation; anticipating catastrophes; and fear, despair and giving up.
In the third section, disavowal is implicit in the respondent’s view of their social world. It includes attitudes projected onto others; pressures to conform to social norms; views of declining and political momentum; authoritarian solutions; views of activism; the part played by earlier and future generations; and reframing scientific understanding as debate and denial or ignorance of scientific understandings. In practice, a distinction between individual and socially based denial is hard to sustain. Thoughts and feelings can be seen as part psychological and part social. The advantage of a psycho-social approach is that it comprehends both the psychological and the social worlds.

Negation: Disregard of human consequences of climate change

It could be argued that the following participants were not denying climate change but simply saw other issues as more important. I consider the validity of the concept of denial in these circumstances in Chapter 10.

Trevor\(^9\) represented engagement with climate change as a straightforward choice of social issues, and prioritised human rights over environmental concerns, probably influenced by his family’s Spanish civil war experiences, his climate change scepticism and his avowed moderation:

I started getting involved in human rights issues, also, erm, environment, but still, I mean I always, erm, even more recently when I studied university here I always had, erm, kind of a, erm, a, priorities within all these social issues so I would tend to prioritise human rights and some other concerns over, erm, environment and climate change.

Then along the way, I, erm, obviously I, I bumped into erm, well, Greenpeace activities and the way they tried to lobby, erm, either states or private companies for them not to, erm, act, erm, against the environment. I … some remarks from authors … were comparing somehow the, erm, actions that, erm, environmentalists were, environmental activists were taking, comparing them to, erm, terrorism, but in the way that both sides were, erm, were lobbying and bypassing the law, and boycotting, but the, the means were similar, but the goals were most obviously very different.

Actually I grew up in a, it is a small town but … no; it didn’t have a sense of being connected with that environment outside the town … I have never had a, erm, connection maybe with, erm, nature, yeah … maybe I was more into human feelings and relationships, yeah, rather than nature.

Benjamin\(^10\) was primarily concerned with relieving poverty, had little environment sense :and did not see climate change as a primary concern for the people he sought to help :

It is a question of how far one is aware of the natural world and the, you know, the non-urban environment and what connection one has to it. It sounds as if you feel fairly detached from

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\(^9\) See Appendix I

\(^10\) See Appendix I
that, having always lived, grown up in [an inner-city borough] through most of your childhood.

I mean when I think of the environment I often think, like, erm, in quite urban terms. So, like, it was nice to, live in [his university town] because there were a lot of open green spaces, and that was nice, but I mean there was a lot more to the environment than, open spaces in cities … What I am thinking, erm, immediately about, say, my environment, I will think about things like that; erm; rather than some of the more like, kind of, broader thoughts of biodiversity and, erm, and so on, so, all like, forests and, and the like

Whilst I think that, erm, the environment affects those kinds of people that my work at [a social enterprise] targeted, it often feels to me like the environment is one of a long list of problems that affect them, erm, and, whilst there might be a way to address some of those individual problems, erm, I am, in my work I am most interested in, erm, increasing their resilience to whatever problems like this come along. So, for example, erm, so a lot of, so a lot of, er, people in some of the developing countries [his social enterprise] worked at, there were much bigger questions about, erm, you know, entitlement type issues; so maybe food production within the country – that is actually quite good, but in terms of how they distribute things, if there is kind of shortages in specific areas, there is a lot of issues around that.

Francis\textsuperscript{11}, Albert\textsuperscript{12} (an IT consultant) and Edward\textsuperscript{13} (a City worker) prioritised other concerns and disregarded climatic and environmental damage, and thus were implicitly unconcerned about climate change and the environment.

**Deliberate anti-environmental action**

Many participants described knowingly acting in environmentally damaging ways, sometimes with a clear sense of entitlement. They often expressed some discomfort, but without explicit guilt. They also conformed to Cohen’s category of interpretive denial (see Chapter 3). Francis and Holly have already been referred to in Chapter 5.

Pamela\textsuperscript{14}:

I am a hypocrite on other things, because I do like, you know, going away for the weekend to somewhere that I need a short haul flight.

Victor\textsuperscript{15}:

Probably travelling less, but that is a difficult one; we love travelling, jump on a plane, you know, off we go, we do it a lot … Yeah, [wife’s name] and myself, you know, we like, we

\textsuperscript{11} See Chapter 5
\textsuperscript{12} Not described in Appendix I
\textsuperscript{13} Not described in Appendix I
\textsuperscript{14} See Appendix I
\textsuperscript{15} See Appendix I
like to travel. We went to India at Christmas, because we can [he laughs]; we did. Let alone
what that means: what that nine hours of plane in the sky there and nine hours back meant for
the environment – we didn’t consider. Even though we are both intelligent enough to know
that lots of other people doing that is probably not sustainable.

Clive\(^\text{16}\):

Many people in the world seem to be willing to accept a kind of sceptical position if it is put
in the newspaper or whatever, because it is comforting; and it is easier; and it allows you to
be, selfish, while not believing that you are being selfish because, ‘Oh, it doesn’t matter, I can
carry on as I am’.

Arthur\(^\text{17}\):

I don’t really feel I can be in a position to criticise anybody because I go on holiday – I am
sure you go on holiday – erm, and it, erm, and I travel a lot for work, and so, so, erm; it is,
erm, it is an awkward.

Resisting change

Victor, Arthur and Brian\(^\text{18}\) were all open and honest about their own or other people’s reluctance to
accept climate change data.

Victor:

*She has got quite a strong sense of values, is the sort of thing you are saying.*

I think so; that’s probably about right; yeah. Or is more, willing to make a change; I will, but I
am more gradual, erm, it is more likely to happen gradually, I suspect, than quickly.

I mean, if, if tomorrow there was a decision collectively, you know, nationally, whatever it
was, that we all needed to do this, erm, I would be up for it [he laughs]. I would be there; I am
not going to be a leading light.

Arthur:

I think that the status quo, is probably, you know, it is easier to just keep pursuing policies
they are pursuing; it is quick to put your money, isn’t it? It is. Whenever you, if you want to
change the way you operate … it is fairly disruptive; and in a time – as now, which we are in,
when the economy has just been flatlining – it is, it is going to be a little bit difficult perhaps
for a government … to come in and perhaps try and change, i.e. where we source energy
from.

Brian was setting up an environmental charity:

\(^\text{16}\) See Appendix I

\(^\text{17}\) See Appendix I

\(^\text{18}\) Not described in Appendix I
I spent some time looking at these long-term cycles in climate … and it’s a lot of nonsense, er; and I think underlying that, was, is still there, a reluctance to change; and I suppose I feel two things. One is a fear of unknown consequences, and one, and the other is a reluctance to change the way that one lives at the moment.

Beliefs about the independence of climate research

Both activists and sceptics suspected that their opponents were receiving unfair financial backing. Climate change sceptics believed that government funding for research was biased in favour of scientists avowing man-made climate change; activists suspected the fossil fuel industry of providing financial support for climate change scepticism.

Edward worked in the City and organised lectures by climate change sceptics. He described how funding for research was refused to climate change sceptic researchers and went to scientists who support evidence for man-made global warming; he doubted that there is finance from industry to support scepticism:

The governmental subventions they got to support research etc. was refused, effectively, if they were researching anything other than, yes, carbon emissions by human activity.

Arthur suggested that the influence of oil companies is more indirect than direct:

Do you subscribe to the theory that the sceptics are heavily funded?
I haven’t necessarily got kind of, solid proof of how, and how much, but it is, you know, it is fairly obvious: you look at the big companies in the world, and where the wealth is, and there is a lot of wealth centred around fossil fuels; money does talk, really, erm, whether it is in terms of lobbying government or in terms of, erm, influencing the media. I think that, you know, it is no coincidence that, erm, you know, the companies behind fossil fuel exploitation don’t have really much of an interest in pushing a cleaner, greener future … They are able to have fairly significant influence, I would say more in politics than in media.

Disavowal: Dissociation

As a brief reminder, disavowal is when two incompatible ideas are consciously held separately in the mind. Victor was perfectly conscious of thoughts that he then successfully disregarded:

Where I have been [five-second pause]: you know, it’s one of those things, the environment, it is a bit like eating meat: if I do it, recognising full well that, how it is produced is often horrendous, and I just choose not to think too much about that, even though, you know, in my head, and through reading and understanding, you know, I know that it is not, not a good scene. And maybe the environment is a bit like that: you know, I close off a little bit of, erm, you know, I am aware of – that something is going on.
Charles, a retired medical researcher, disavowed guilt feelings and consciously created a split within himself:

I don’t feel guilty, no I don’t feel guilty. I mean I, I, I sort of, I, I put up a kind of, I put up a wall.

Mary, an artist and lecturer, dissociated from an awareness of smog, and Nora, a single parent on benefits, dissociated from abstract information which she could not relate to directly.

Mary:

It is not until you go up into the mountains above Los Angeles and look down into the soup, when you literally cannot see below you, the brown below you is not a cloud, it is actually pollution; but then you go down below and you forget again.

Nora:

Where you hear on the news about the rainforest being cut down in Brazil, and you think, oh no! But because it is so far away … and it is not on your doorstep, then it is not going to bother you. But of course it will, because it will have an effect on the world.

They both needed to dissociate themselves from thoughts they found difficult to understand and absorb.

Mary:

She was pointing two and three and five miles away and talking about how that mountain used to be under water and, and how this shift was doing that and – it hurt my head.

Nora:

I tried to watch Brian Cox one day … and he was talking about the universe is expanding, and one day it will just, expand out of existence; and I tried to, my brain just couldn’t comprehend what he was saying, because I remember thinking, ‘Oh, erm, oh it will be all right, because, erm, there will be ancestors [sic] of [her son aged 3] here’ … It is almost too much to think about.

Clive linked how incomprehensible climate change is, to the fear of relations dying:

It is hard, it is one of those things that it is hard to find meaning in; I mean, it is again, something you try not to think about because it is so huge and difficult to process and get

19 Not described in Appendix I
20 Not described in Appendix I
21 Not described in Appendix I
your head around, and sometimes you think you have, and then sometimes, it is just too big and strange to think about … Only in terms of, erm, relatives having health difficulties and scares and those things are times when you think about it: you think, ‘That person might not be there, sooner than I thought.’

**Powerlessness and despair**

Pamela, Rosemary and Victor were unlike the majority of participants in seeing themselves as capable of acting and making a difference. Chapter 5 describes Holly’s sense of capacity to take action. Pamela and Arthur both emphasised that each person individually needs to be responsible for acting environmentally.

**Pamela:**

I think that, we do have to do it individually, because I think it is very easy to say, ‘Ah well, no one else is so I won’t either’ … And I do think that, that you have to understand that it is individual responsibility as well; but it has to be that that is an incremental and, you know, and I set somebody else and someone else, and they affect two other people, because, you know, I, I always try to persuade my friends to start cycling and, you know, and everyone who I convince, you know, people who are like, ‘Oh, I would really like to but I am scared about this’. Well, I was scared and, you know, because I think, you know, and I have sort of achieved in two or three of my friends in taking up cycling.

**Rosemary:**

From that, very cauldron-y place of the Green Alliance, I, I really started to kind of, you know, the dots to, started to come together in my head that, you know, we were being quite successful at getting the conversation going with other green diplomacy skills in Westminster and Whitehall.

We were really motoring as an investment team; we were very involved in all this policy stuff, you know; we were really shape-shifting what was possible and doable.

**Victor:**

I mean, the new bus to London is a brilliant thing, it is fantastic; erm, it is a little bit more expensive but it is well designed and it is a hell of a lot cleaner than, erm; so I just wonder, you know, and people like it, you know, I think, very clever products, brilliant … it is a really interesting product because it proves that you can, you can create solutions that are popular, that are well thought out, that use the best of engineering and creative, you know, intelligence really. It is a bloke from the Royal College of Art and a few engineers and, hey presto!

**Arthur:**

I think everyone needs to take a bit, a bit of responsibility for it, erm, you know and I think that really things have to be led from politics. I mean it is, it is one thing providing

22 See Appendix I
information about climate change; it is another thing actually engaging in conversation, erm, trying to discuss how to, erm, to mitigate against it.

However a majority of my participants felt despairing about possible action on climate change, including Clive, Rosemary (who having previously felt capable of acting, now felt despairing) and Karen. They expressed feeling unable to act in the face of forces beyond their control. This could have been realistic, but it could also be a defensive disavowal of potentially taking action on climate change.

Clive:

It is a feeling of, sort of, frustration and powerlessness, I suppose; yeah, because you do all the things that, a few years ago, that were talked about as so important, you know, recycling – Stop it! [referring to the cat; he laughs] She likes that chair – erm, yeah, you do all the things you think you can do on an individual level; and simultaneously you have guilt about using too many plastic bags and, you know, buying the right coffee and, you know, little things like that; and you know at the same time that, millions of other people are not worrying about these things.

Rosemary:

I, I do feel, erm, like those two events for the – psychologically have sort of knocked the stuffing out of me, in terms of feeling like I have got something really real to offer … At one point I really felt like I was in the vanguard of defining what were the right policies – what were the right things that needed to happen, institutions or whatever in the world – and now, I, I’m, I have eaten a lot of humble pie; I am not sure so much, so, erm, so, you know, you’re, you have got me on the issue of climate change, at a time in my life where I, I am not as, I am not so confident about what the answers are.

Karen, a supermarket worker23:

No I don’t think so, I don’t think a blind bit of difference; you know, the way I see it is when I [unclear] ain’t no one’s going to notice; you know, there is no – ‘I’ve not made any big dent in that, in the world today’, you know, [unclear] I’ll still be working at that [supermarket] there, that people will notice that I am not there no more – you know, that kind of a thing; but in the bigger picture, no, I don’t think the, you know, I don’t think the individual, even in a, you know, a relatively sized group, you don’t make that much of a dent to anything, it has got to be worldwide.

Responses to climate change activism

An individual can disavow environmental concerns and distance him- or herself by disparaging or ridiculing environmental activists as extremist. I explore these issues theoretically in Chapter 3, and more fully in Chapter 7.

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23 Not referred to in Appendix I
Holly associated being better informed and active with having a leadership role in a political pressure group. As the oldest in her family, perhaps she thought of herself as having to take the lead.

Pamela did not want to be labelled as militant, given that militants can be perceived as crazy. However, she was happy to evangelise about cycling (illustrated above under ‘Powerlessness and despair’):

And to, yeah, cycle overland to come home to visit me from Georgia, you know, and to go by train and bus, and to say, ‘I am not getting on a plane’: that is something very admirable; it is very easy to assume that person is a little bit crazy.

Rosemary described how idealised but marginalised she felt for what she was doing:

‘Oh, it is amazing what you are doing, [her name], erm, thank goodness there are people like you in the world’. It is like, no, that is not how this is going to be solved at all; you know, it is like we all need to be, have a different mindset about how we think about holidays, how we think about, you know, moving around, you know, our relationship with nature.

Victor expressly declined to take an active stance until obliged to by some collective social decision (illustrated above under ‘Resisting change’ in 2. Negation).

David^24, a heating engineer, saw activists as having an impeded capacity to think constructively, which he described as ‘hysterical’:

If you are going to be a pressure group, you, you think you’ve got to persuade the rest of the population, and you think hysteria is a good way of doing that. And I can’t bear that because then the thinking gets very woolly.

Gloria^25, an NGO executive, avoided being thought of as an environmental extremist, by not ‘lecturing’ her friends:

It’s all about eating out, doing all these different fun things, erm, which, you know, you sort of disregard what kind of impact you might be having, and I, it’s just not fun to be thinking about it all the time, either, erm, and I just don’t want to lecture any of my friends or anybody.

Louis^26, an IT worker, had had an activist role in travelling across Europe and central Asia on a bicycle, but wanted to avoid a fundamentalist stance, for fear of being judgmental:

[^24]: Not referred to in Appendix I
[^25]: Not referred to in Appendix I
[^26]: Not referred to in Appendix I
You get these people who are a bit sort of fundamentalist about it … they also get the mindset of being fundamentalists so it is kind of, it is a dangerous mindset to have really, because always, especially, it means that if you are judgemental about other people, you know.

Mary was feeling demoralised and was returning to North America at the time I interviewed her, because of the absence of job opportunities for her in the UK. She described opting out of being active on economic grounds:

It is just a matter of survival, and we are getting more and more aware of not only how short life is, but as life gets longer and we live half of our adult lives over 60 and retired, feeling more and more … finances are dictating our choices. Quite honestly I am going to care less about the chickens and buy the cheap chicken … I can’t literally afford any more to fight the battle.

Edward took an actively sceptical position. He saw environmental activists as extremists that hate the human race:

The sort of people … who at heart … don’t really like the human race, and feel that they have a sort of rooted wish to see the human race punished for our sins.

The climate change movement, if that’s how to describe it, was populated by charlatans like Al Gore – now thoroughly discredited – but by politicians generally.

Optimism

Optimism, when tinged with doubt and anxiety, may be a disavowal of pessimism or despair. Brian made a link between being willing to take disinterested action now and having optimistic hope for the future:

In order to take action in the present which gives no benefit in the present – but that you believe and hope will have benefit in the future – you have to have faith. You have to believe, don’t you, at some level, that what you’re doing – that’s almost where you start, isn’t it? You have to believe in what you’re doing now in the future.

Arthur needed an optimistic stance to sustain him in environmental journalism, but admitted that sustaining optimism could be difficult:

It is really depressing sometimes; but, erm, you have just got to be, you do have to be optimistic that we can, we can create change, erm, and, it probably will have to come in the 11th hour really about – there are innovations coming out.

It is hard to have any optimism about the direction we are heading in, erm, especially when, with milestones like, record of ice melts.

I illustrated Holly’s uncertain optimism in Chapter 5.
Mania

Rosemary described her excitement after university in becoming engaged in environmental work and climate change action, when everything seemed to fall into place for her. This may have been a disavowal of the impact of her brother’s death in a road accident, and it was hard for her to recall exactly when that had happened. Her excited response may have distracted her from her own real needs and so eventually diminished her contribution to action on climate change.

What about your brother – when did his accident happen?

His accident happened when I was – I. I took a gap year before going to uni, and, it must have been, the dates just become a blur but it must have been my first year at uni, I guess.; erm, I mean he was three years younger than me and he was just going to be, erm, 19, so, erm, that makes sense? I was 22; yeah. So [unclear] now. So had I finished uni? No, I was at uni, erm; either in my first or second year; I am sorry [she laughs] … I think, in a way, I mean, you know, I missed my buddy, but my own life was suddenly kind of really opening out, so, the pain that it might have been, was still there, but there was a lot of distraction and I think the same goes for Mum and Dad getting divorced.

At the end of the Nineties, for example, I got an intern in and we did some really ground-breaking work on, ‘How do you actually start to create an accounting methodology for calculating the carbon footprint of, erm, a company, an enterprise?’

Catastrophising

A number of participants expressed varying kinds of preoccupation with catastrophes, which I explore theoretically in Chapter 3. This might be a disavowal of the slower long-term implications of climate change. Some suggested that a major crisis would have to occur before people were persuaded of the necessity to act on climate change. Victor may have been disguising his fears with his ironic reference to ‘lots of death’:

Well, there will probably have to be a few disasters; and lots of death [he laughs]; and you know, erm, you know, probably a few unprecedented hurricanes in the wrong places, will do it, I suspect … I imagine that a few hurricanes would probably [he laughs] do something about it, if there is enough evidence to convince the sceptics that that is, you know, that is because of this.

Clive acknowledged the effect of catastrophic events:

I think certain, yeah, catastrophic events do, maybe, have an effect on the debate certainly, yeah. Erm. [Three-second delay] But again there is always an argument going on saying, you know, these things have always happened and, erm, you can skew data in a particular way to say, you know, what is happening is not surprising or, different to what has happened before.

Albert (an IT consultant) and Karen were explicitly fascinated by catastrophes.
Albert:

I suppose, I don’t know, along with, I gather it’s a significant segment of the population, I enjoy, or think I enjoy, disaster scenarios.

Karen perhaps unconsciously linked her fear of global catastrophes with needing to keep her children absolutely safe, probably arising from her husband’s premature death:

Oh God, yes! Yes! I love disaster films! I am [unclear], I know everything to do – I know all the countries to go to if anything terrible happens; I am telling you, I am well planned.

Anywhere you can see an accident, I will see it.

Some participants referred to the apocalyptic climate change visions of others. Francis equated the threat from climate change with the unfulfilled prophecies of social breakdown in the 1970s (like the Peter Cook sketch described in Chapter 1). He could hence similarly dismiss the climate change threat described in Chapter 5.

As illustrated in Chapter 5, Holly avoided dire warnings but reluctantly accepted part of their truth; she tried to keep a sense of agency, but she was doubtful.

Edward dismissed climate change activists as promoting an apocalyptic view of the consequences of not acting on climate change:

The promotion of the idea that the human race was destroying the world – that ‘It was Armageddon’ thing.

Simon27 suspected the media of intending to make people fear a millennial catastrophe:

It is to make you feel different as a race and as a group of people, to make you think differently, yes; but it’s, it is how much of that depicting the reality; how much of that is actually hidden away from the; not many people think about the earth’s cycle, and the actual science behind it; and yet you have got religions that will deny that; and there is so many different factors that come together, despite how great Brian Cox is doing in pushing science and, and all that into people’s consciousness, it is still the, the end of the world is nigh, still circulates with people, because it is such a strong message I suppose.

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27 Not referred to in Appendix I
Forms of social disavowal

This section deals with participants’ disavowal expressed by their disowning and projection of personal attitudes onto the wider society, and their disregard of the science of climate change, implications for future generations, and political realities concerning authoritarian political solutions.

Authoritarian solutions

Hetherington and Suhay (2011: 552) described how participants low in authoritarian attitudes became more authoritarian under the threat of terrorism. Francis, Victor and David expressed some dissatisfaction with the way that the democratic process works. They questioned whether a more authoritarian form of government might make a more effective response to the challenges of climate change. Francis ruled out the possibility of effective mitigation as unthinkable in a democratic context. Victor referred to the need to please the electorate in the democratic process, preferring ironic language like ‘tricky’ and ‘works a treat’ to a more direct statement:

Well, democracy is a tricky business isn’t it, because, people won’t necessarily choose the hard route?
No, very true – they want to get re-elected.
Elections and all of that stuff mean that, you know [he laughs], where it is … the short-term option works a treat.

David questioned democracy and played with the idea of the Chinese government being able to take decisions that democratic governments can’t or won’t, but he admitted that this could be an aspect of a dissociated attitude:

There is the possibility of the authoritarian countries, in particular China, kind of saying, ‘Well, we are just going to sort this out.’

The idea that democracy is leading, is leading us up the garden path, and we had better abandon it, is – it sort of floats around but, you see, part of that defence is that I don’t take anything seriously.

Intergenerational concerns

These participants’ thoughts and feelings about future generations seemed to spring from their particular circumstances. In Chapter 10 I consider what is known through surveys about concern for future generations. All except Karen expressed how difficult it is to think beyond one’s
grandchildren’s generation. Those with children – like Brian, Karen and Charles – did express concern about their children and grandchildren.

Brian is married with two young adult children:

But that, I suppose, what that speaks to, is the need to respond. 35 years is something most of us can look forward, and say ‘OK, that is within my lifetime, it’s important.’ 100 years? ‘Not my problem, and no need to change now.’ So I think it all ties around, ‘Do I need to make any change now?’

Karen is a widow with three young adult and teenage children:

I mean obviously when my children were younger, I just got on with looking after the kids, and everything like that. Now they are older, you try and look out for the outlook, and watch out for them and sort of like, you know, you think to yourself, ‘Well, I’ll be gone in a matter of years myself’; but then it is a case of: the grandchildren, great-grandchildren.

Charles has adult children and grandchildren, and explicitly described his concerns only going as far as his grandchildren though he may have had further generations in mind:

All these things [heating and running a large house] gobble up energy. And I, you just worry about what’s going to happen to your, your children and indeed your children’s children.

Pamela, a feminine and maternal woman with no children, having previously found the idea of having children unthinkable, realised recently that she is nearly at the age at which her mother died, leaving her an infant:

I think I have probably subconsciously assumed that – my mum died when she was 33, so I think I just don’t think beyond that … I suddenly realised that I had never thought about, you know, I want, I know I want to get married, I know I want to have children, but I have never pictured that … I always thought about where I wanted my career to be and, wanting to be able to buy my own place and, live in my own home and, afford my own home and things; and I had always had those kind of dreams but never anything beyond … and I, suddenly thought that I probably somewhere just, yeah … and I don’t want to – yeah, exactly – and I know that, erm, what I don’t want to do is leave a child, like … I get you: like you. Like you were.

Arthur, an environmental journalist, naturally thought in terms of his grandchildren, though he had no children at that time:

I would rather see a government that is in control of my country, investing in something that my grandkids will be able to, will still be using.
Gloria, with no children, expressed complex concerns about having children, inspired by a remark of her boyfriend’s grandfather. She was less concerned for her child’s future, more for the carrying capacity of the world’s resources:

Like my boyfriend’s grandfather said, ‘How could you even consider, like, bringing a child into this sort of world?’ And it does sort of make you think, ‘God!’ … All my, loads of my friends are having babies. I would never want to have more than one, just because that would be a terrible drain on resources, which is how I think about kids actually, erm; which is obviously been shaped by my whole environmental, erm, er, sort of values. Erm; yeah, I mean, it wouldn’t stop me I guess, but it does make me a bit worried.

Nora (with one son aged 3), facing the unthinkable vastness of the universe, was comforted by the thought of her son having offspring who will be there in the future. I illustrated this above (under ‘Dissociation’ in 3. Disavowal).

Mary, Clive, Albert and Benjamin, all with no children, found it difficult to imagine the effect of climate change on future generations. Mary felt that having no children was what stopped her from being more of a campaigner:

I don’t have children, I don’t really have close relatives that are that much younger than I am.

Clive thought that the arrival of a child would change things:

On one level it seems slightly insulting that people wouldn’t have the imagination to be able to understand – or don’t have friends with children or children that they know and care about – but, I think, I am almost inevitably led to the conclusion that, when I have children it will suddenly seem more important and urgent and vital to sort of safeguard their future.

Albert saw his having no children as excusing him from needing to have a position about the fate of future generations:

I suppose there are various aspects of my attitude; um; and I can see how it might differ from other people. For example, I’m single; I don’t have any progeny; I’ve no need to worry about.

Benjamin based his dismissal of intergenerational justice on orthodox economic theory, and the problem of comparing present day economic issues to the cost of today’s action to future generations:

I think I just go by the rule of thumb that, erm, having done some economics, intergenerational thinking is very challenging … So, if you were to try it ov–, over a long enough timescale, then, you know, maybe the industrial production pretty much just needs to stop, erm; so when you say that you want to look after future generations, erm, the question becomes like, ‘Well, which ones?’
Science reframed as debate

As I describe in Chapter 1, climate scientists are almost unanimously convinced by the evidence for man-made climate change, but the issue has often been reframed as a debate between two equally valid points of view. Some participants including Holly, described in Chapter 5, expressing the issues as rival points of view, demonstrated how this reframing has succeeded.

Arthur emphasised a perceived need for balance in news reporting:

There is still a big ignorance about it, you know … you sort of combine the total readership of newspapers and, and the BBC, and the reality is that they are not going to reach every person in the country … It is all very well holding, say, the media to account, for not pushing an agenda enough, or for pushing an agenda that is perhaps, erm, creating difference, but ultimately, where is the education about climate change, in schools, in, in colleges?

Mainstream news, aside from the BBC is, is ultimately a business and, it is about – as well as providing balanced stories – it is about providing news balance.

Clive described how misleading ‘balanced’ news reporting is:

They see people arguing that scientists aren’t agreed and there is not a consensus – when there clearly is – because there is enough prominent, you know, dissent, and the people who do agree, the contrarians are kind of featured in the media again as, kind of, counterpoint to the debate, to say, ‘OK, we are giving a balanced argument, because we are having someone on one side of the argument and someone on the other side of the argument’, giving the impression that it is a 50/50 split when it is, you know, something like, you know, 95 or whatever; yeah, so that can skew people’s ideas about, what the science is and, how settled the science is.

Albert accepted the consensus over the reality of man-made climate change but also referred to the vociferous climate change sceptic scientists:

Scientifically of course, and also, well, sociologically what’s interesting is that there’s a debate between people. The majority of scientists – there’s quite complicated dynamic, isn’t there? There’s the general debate on the scientists with the other scientists. Most scientists in the world believe that, em, that the evidence is incontrovertible that, a) there is climate change, and b) that it’s due to homo sapiens. But there are, there’s an increasing, an increasingly vociferous minority of scientists who deny that there is climate change.

Edward saw it as a straightforward matter of there being two sides:

I can’t say who is right and who is wrong, but I think I know enough to be able to say without fear of contradiction that there are two sides.

Science disregarded
Benjamin was aware of the statistics over climate change, but believed that the needs of people in developing countries today override the needs of future generations. Since much damage may already have been done, it may be too late to achieve change, so he focused on people in the present. His disregard of the data on climate change is an example of what Zerubavel calls sociological denial; Cohen, implicatory denial; and of negation, where the facts are known but there is no imperative to act on them:

I know the climate change data but I do doubt the relevance of any given specific action; so I think there is that real challenge there in terms of what we have done to the climate already, like, erm; I don’t know that incremental activity makes it particularly worse, in that we might have passed some quite relevant, erm, barriers already; yeah, we might have passed some quite relevant levels, so, I’m not sure of the damage of, like, incremental activity, so that makes me doubly, erm, want to focus on current generations of living people, erm, rather than future generations.

Ignorance of science

Karen and Nora may either not have known that greenhouse gases like CO₂ emissions cause long-term unpredictable climatic change, or they were in literal denial, where knowledge of the facts is denied (Cohen).

Karen saw pollution as the problem:

I mean like, the wildlife in the sea, near enough non-existent in certain species; you know, erm –

*What do you put that down to?*

Erm, pollution. Pollution; and, like you say, to climate change, so therefore they, they are not getting the, you know, like, with the – oh what you call them? Oh, I can’t even think what they are called [she laughs]; you know, where they live underwater; I can’t think what it is called now.

*Coral?*

That’s it. The coral, yeah, I mean; there was that beautiful one near Australia, isn’t it?

*What do you get the impression is the real cause of climate change, then?*

It is the pollution, I mean, like; well, I saw a documentary – God, I can’t even think now – they have mined somewhere in China, erm and that the smoke coming out of their mines so that they burn it all and everything, they were saying that China is one of the highest polluters.

Nora was not clear what problems are associated with automobile emissions:

*What do you think is the issue regarding petrol?*

Well; I suppose that, it is erm, that it is made, you know, it is not just there, is it? It is manufactured, and; I guess it, I don’t know, drills.

*Do you think it has got anything to do with the climate?*

Well, I suppose so because erm, I mean nowadays it is quite – there is a lot of cars that are made … I have noticed that there are cars which are supposed to have lower emissions.
Science contradicted

Edward, Simon and Trevor all questioned climate science and disregarded the scientific consensus that there is man-made climate change, all examples of Cohen’s literal denial. Benjamin was aware of climate science data, but thought that the needs of poor people in developing countries took priority. Clive drew attention to this happening in the media.

Edward worked in the City in a financial institution and actively campaigned against climate change mitigation:

I have sort of been flying the flag for the alternative point of view, as I think we all ought to. So here at my [professional firm] I’ve been laying on a series of lectures.

Trevor questioned the basis of reports of man-made climate change on the basis that researchers are not neutral and there is no agreed and settled science:

I don’t think there is a global agreement on the, erm, approaches [to climate change] and the real situation because, now and then you will find … find different and sometimes opposed, erm, studies. So that does leave you feeling a bit uncertain, a bit, you know, undecided about how far it is … whether it is human inspired. Well, I have got my personal views … I think it has been catalysed, you can say so, by erm, the human behaviour; but at the same time I think, and it might be an organic process … I tend to be, erm, with all my, erm, remarks and thoughts and statements I tend to be, erm, very, erm, moderate.

Simon was sceptical about climate science, and regarded much media material as designed to induce guilt in readers:

The little knowledge that I do have of science – as far as I am aware, climate change is something unavoidable. No matter, it is not something we have done; it is a natural cycle of the earth, so we can’t possibly avoid it; even though that [unclear] put pressure on the earth in a way that it wasn’t designed to be, it is unavoidable: it would have happened at some point, because of the rotation of the earth and the sun and the universe.

The way media is [unclear] works, it is, it’s a guilt trip. Making these films like, sort of, it is scaremongering. I was very aware of what the media tries to push into you, the way they construct things, to make you feel it is your fault, but there is so much, not just only climate change, but whether in anything, you are always trying to be made to feel bad.

Clive drew attention to this happening in the media:

A lot of the stuff we hear about science and scientists is quite, erm, negative in lots of ways. I just remembered a couple of years ago there was controversy about, erm, the – I can’t remember where it was – that there were some e-mails that were hacked and reveal something about scientists falsifying or misrepresenting information; and it was seized upon by all sorts of people to say, ‘OK, this discredits the science completely’.
Holly and Victor seemed relieved to encounter a report that questioned climate science, but in general fully accepted the reality of man-made climate change.

Holly:

I did hear something quite interesting on the radio, probably two years ago, which was saying that actually there is just a long-term up and down in the, in the temper–, in the temperature of the earth and that we are simply going through a, a swing one way at the moment and we should not think that therefore that it is, erm, that it’s a crisis at all. I don’t know enough about it to judge that, though it does seem to me that there is very strange weather going on; I am not a scientist.

Victor:

And it was interesting, just on Radio 4 this morning, erm, someone was saying – I hadn’t realised this – that the actual warming of the atmosphere was, erm, is pretty static since about 1998. I hadn’t actually heard that before; it is interesting.

Projected personal attitudes

Pamela, Clive and Arthur described other people as settling for tokenistic action, questioning environmentally friendly action because it is inconvenient, or becoming numbed. Simon saw the social environment of the country as conformist and limited. These thoughts and feelings were perhaps to some extent projections of their own feelings.

Pamela believed that people have been ‘ lulled’ into being content with token action for climate change and the environment:

What has actually happened is that people have been lulled into a sense that ‘If I do my recycling, I do my bit for the environment, and if I buy a Hessian sack from Sainsbury’s that is enough’, kind of thing.

Clive believed that people don’t want to engage with the origins of their food and the production processes and were content to accept facile justifications for this:

People just want to live on it [the earth]. They want to go to the grocery store; they do not want to find out that, you know – I have heard so many people say – organic chicken is in fact dirtier and worse than if you buy chicken from, you know, cheap chicken from Sainsbury’s, erm; people don’t want to be inconvenienced. And quite honestly, it is exhausting to try to learn what is the best thing to buy.

Arthur thought that when people received a lot of information about the environment, they reacted by denying and cutting themselves off from it:
We have become more aware, both as journalists and readers, of the environment and how it is changing; but I do, I feel that maybe, erm, we hear about climate change a lot, and, I think, perhaps some people have become a little bit numb to the reality of it.

Simon was threatened by the natural world, and returned to an urban environment as quickly as possible:

I’ve been to the countryside on tours and things and it scares me; it is too quiet … They are all very much their own little communities, and there is not a lot of, there is not a lot of debate, or, or, you don’t get to meet many different people; it is their own little world.

Conclusions

Chapters 5 and 6 emphasise the way that all my participants were implicated in negation and disavowal. The form of denial that each participant adopted was often connected with their temperament, family of origin and present social and professional position.

Some socially conscious participants, committed to human rights or relieving poverty in developing countries, treated climate change threats as less important than their own concerns.

A number of participants, among the more socially aware, were able to disregard their own anti-environmental behaviour, and in particular, many were aware of the implications of flying, yet felt entitled to fly and hard to resist, even when the flight was purely for a holiday.

A number of participants honestly avowed their own resistance to becoming aware of the science of climate change and its consequences.

Among the many forms of negation were putting unwelcome facts to the back of one’s mind and acting as if they did not exist, treating the facts of climate change as irrelevant, or detaching oneself from the facts and disclaiming responsibility. Feeling overwhelmed and unable to comprehend knowledge about the environment and climate change, and seeing evidence of climate change or environmental damage but then treating it as if it were not there, were kinds of disavowal. Another kind of response was a fascination with catastrophic scenarios, like possible extremely destructive climate events. Some suspected that the media or activists promoted ideas of climate catastrophe for their own ends.

Being able to act over climate change depends on a belief that an individual can make a difference by acting, which is associated with a generally optimistic outlook. Optimism was evidently indispensable with a number of participants in enabling them to act on climate change, but it may also have been a
defence against doubt and anxiety. There was also one example of an exuberant, manic approach that carried the individual along, but may have neglected important realities. Many participants felt helpless, impotent and despairing about taking useful action over climate change. Some questioned whether it was possible to act on climate change within short-term democratic election cycles, and wondered about an authoritarian power structure that could simply order necessary changes.

Environmental activists provoked disturbing feelings among those who preferred not to become too deeply engaged in climate change concerns and would rather distance themselves from environmental activism. I explore this theoretically in Chapter 3. Some did not want to become identified as extremists, or as slightly crazy, or as imposing their beliefs on other people – or to risk being judgmental about them. One participant saw environmentalists as hating the human race and wanting to see it punished. One saw forms of environmental direct action as terrorist. One felt that participation in a pressure group undermined being able to think clearly. For some people, this came back to the question of how an individual perceives his or her own responsibility for action.

With regard to future generations and future climate change, most participants could not imagine beyond the consequences for their grandchildren. For those without children, this was even harder.

Thoughts and feelings about the science of climate change were often shaped into a disavowing position. Many disregarded the fact that virtually all climate scientists agree that man-made climate change is taking place, picking up small news items that slightly contradicted the established science. They disagreed with the findings of science, represented the situation as a debate between two equal opposing points of view about climate science, and could not – or chose not to – understand the scientific findings.

My participants were implicitly participating in cultural or interpretive communities in the repeated wish not to be seen as fanatical environmentalists. In Chapter 7 I identify some correspondences between association with interpretive communities, cultural theory positions, and thoughts and feelings regarding the environment.

This chapter has demonstrated the wide range of forms of negation and disavowal employed by the great majority of my participants, and distinguished between the two.
Chapter 7: Social and Economic Influences

Introduction

This chapter considers various aspects of my participants’ thoughts and feelings about their social and economic circumstances in relation to climate change and the environment. Sections 2 and 3 concern the implications of participants’ optimism or pessimism for their relation to their social worlds. Section 4 deals with how far participants are influenced by forms of interpretive communities, and some of the implications of their involvement or non-involvement. Section 5 reflects participants’ thoughts and feelings about the effect of wealth or poverty on their own and others’ response to climate change. My chief conclusion is that each participant’s position is complex and often contradictory. This would conform to a general psycho-social perspective that regards the individual as multi-layered, complex, and subject to conflicting social and psychological pressures and attractions. A divide does emerge between empowered optimists, and apathetic and disempowered pessimists, but even the most empowered participants express complex and unresolved contradictory thoughts and feelings.

Empowered optimists, self-assurance: Optimists

A small proportion of my participants expressed clearly optimistic and empowered attitudes, had pro-environmental feelings and views and were concerned about climate change. All these participants came from secure, stable and supportive family environments. Although Pamela’s mother died when she was an infant and her father was mentally ill, she had a close and loving relationship with her grandparents throughout her childhood. Furthermore, to a greater or lesser extent, this optimistic approach spilled over into feeling empowered to act on climate change. Arthur had a clear sense of purpose as an environmental journalist:

I just decided – I, I, I really don’t know how I was but I was very young when I decided that I wanted to write for the newspapers, erm, because I saw it back then I think as an opportunity to get, get paid to do what I wanted to do which, it still is to an extent. 

Yeah, yeah – it sounds very positive.

But I think what, you know, what I wanted to do has changed overall and, for me, journalism is, is a way of enjoying going to work but at the same time it is also, erm, you know, I see it as, I have a, I have a certain responsibility, erm; if I can, erm, find, find stories, erm, I don’t know, that hold, erm, government to account or, just help push an environmental agenda then that is, that is a good thing.’
You read about the fact that, countries like Greenland and other Arctic countries actually see it as an opportunity then to extract oil from places that were cut off. It is a tragedy, and it is, it is, erm, yeah, I mean it is a shame, it is really depressing sometimes; but, erm, you have just got to be, you do have to be optimistic that we can, we can create change, erm, and, it probably will have to come in the 11th hour really.

Brian was hopeful about the future. Since behaviour that was perfectly acceptable when he was younger is now unacceptable, he hoped that a similar cultural change would be possible as regards action over climate change:

Certainly when I was younger, one drank and one drove, and whether one wore a seatbelt or not I don’t know, but one didn’t really think about it; but my children, and I think that I believe what they tell me, that they consider that to be so beyond the pale, you know, as to be a completely socially unacceptable thing to do … internalisation of a way of behaving as being wrong. Well, whether the same can happen, I would have thought it has to happen, I suppose, with our feelings and views about waste, and to, and the consumption, water usage etc.

I think when you, when you look around at all the things which are projected to happen, it is tempting to think that it is hopeless; but, no, I feel reasonably positive that, that the, that is, that process can happen. Whether – I suppose the question is, how quickly it can happen, and whether it can have enough of an effect quickly enough.

I have outlined Holly’s basically optimistic attitude in Chapter 5.

Pamela expressed her sense of being able to take action, and of being taken care of by her dead mother:

I think I probably had a desire, I probably thought about my loss in life when I was younger, and I probably subconsciously somewhere made a decision, that I would, start to be in charge of that, and that through that I would also help other people and, you know, and I probably do have a desire to, yeah, make the world a better place.

I also feel that, somebody is looking out for me, a little bit. So, yeah, I don’t know, you know, whether I believe in God and, but I do believe in heaven, just because I want to see her again [she laughs]. Erm, yeah, but I – and some things that have happened, that I can take to be that she’s sort of looking out for me.

Yet they all expressed a degree of underlying doubt about their optimism, saying that they would not be able to carry on if they were not optimistic, which reflects Gramsci when he wrote ‘I’m a pessimist because of intelligence, but an optimist because of will’ (Marqusee 2012).

Entitlement

There was some association between optimism and feeling entitled. As described in Chapter 5, Holly felt entitled to fly because she has the money – an example of Norgaard’s (2011: 216–22)
'environmental privilege' (see Chapter 3). She described her frequent flying and heli-skiing as ‘wicked’, but did it because she could afford to. She suggested that acting on climate concern could be a middle-class luxury; yet she aspired to an environmental way of life. At other times, illustrated in Chapter 5, she suggested that everybody should work part-time.

Pamela clearly had misgivings, but still flew for weekend city breaks:

> I am a hypocrite on other things, because I do like, you know, going away for the weekend to somewhere that I need a short-haul flight but, if it is, if it is Paris or Brussels, I would always take the Eurostar even if it – and I do mean that – even if it cost me more money I would take the train when I can. I mean if it cost me £100 more then maybe not, but £20 to £50 more?

Victor made it clear that he felt entitled to fly for holidays despite knowing the environmental cost to the rest of the world, as illustrated in Chapter 6.

When younger, Rosemary wanted to work in America for 3 months, and made it happen from a feeling of entitlement:

> I thought ‘I really, really want to go over there and find out what they are doing’, and so I kind of, paid for a return ticket to the East Coast of the US, and Greyhound buses, went and saw some people that I had found out about that were doing things, and on the back of that got offered an internship in Boston.

**Ambivalence about committed environmentalism**

The optimists described above all felt empowered about environmental issues, but many were concerned not to be seen as lecturing about climate change and the environment, and some participants subtly distanced themselves from strict environmentalist friends and relations. These issues are dealt with in Chapters 5 and 6.

**Self-assurance**

Some self-confident, more individualist, participants subscribed to an orthodox economic or free-market perspective and were less self-doubting than the preceding group of optimistic, environmentally oriented and self-reflective, mainly egalitarian, participants. Edward and Francis subscribed wholeheartedly to market values and wealth creation; Benjamin worked in social enterprises and had altruistic values, but subscribed to traditional economic beliefs, including the overriding importance of economic growth; and though Francis was self-referential and reflexive, he had a clear, settled position over climate change and the environment. Edward and Francis denied any social pressures from interpretive communities but they each revealed ways that they were perhaps influenced by their social groups.
Edward was indifferent to extremes of wealth and poverty, with a *reductio ad absurdum* argument that the poorest 25% of the population might be multi-millionaires with six cars:

> You have things like the Rowntree Trust, and so on, and, you know, they are still banging on about poverty in the UK. I just find this quite upsetting really. I mean, I discovered the other day, that they, when they talk about poor people, they mean the bottom 25%. So the bottom 25% could be multi-millionaires, with six cars in the garage, but they would still be poor because they were in the bottom 25%. And I just think that that is dishonest.

He was a climate change sceptic. He represented himself as independent minded, but conceded that there is considerable climate change scepticism within his social circle, and he may have been more a member of an interpretive community than he admitted. He would be an individualist and hierarchist in cultural theory terms:

> I do recognise in a lot of my friends that their approach to politics is tribal – they just vote Conservative … Well, it’s certainly true that a lot of the people who take the Conservative view and are associated with the Conservatives, tend to disbelieve the people that feel that climate change is happening, they tend. So I think I accept, probably, a greater degree amongst Conservative voters, probably, well, I’m not in a position to say that, and that that would go, probably, for that level of society.

I illustrate in Chapter 5 how Francis saw his colleagues as having a simplistic perspective because of their limited experience of the world outside the university. He explicitly advocated market mechanisms to deal with distributing resources, though he accepted that they may allow the rich to do what others cannot do: for instance, travel, including flying. He preferred to risk damage to future generations rather than ask people today to sacrifice their living standards:

> I think it is bound to be to some extent a market process, in that, erm, you’re never going to stop people flying or driving cars, erm, and therefore there has to be a decision as to who is going to do it; and, erm, the reason why I think markets are useful are because they are transparent, so there is no messing around about what is being done, erm, and they are efficient, erm, and it seems to make people resent them because they resent the idea that rich people will have things that other people won’t do. Although my sense is that that’s how the world works.

Benjamin’s friends shared his views, and agreed with his distinction between environmental and economic perspectives. His social grouping seemed to conform to Lorenzoni’s description of interpretive communities. He could also be seen as individualist or hierarchist in cultural theory terms:

> I think most people have, in my circle have, some level of concern about it; it is very, it is often focused in quite limited areas, so, like, erm, so most people I know would do recycling, or things on those lines, but if you talk about the, like, some of the, like, erm, let’s call them life-changing things you need to do to, to, to start having a substantial impact – so like, you know, changing eating habits, or changing energy uses – I probably don’t have too many friends who are solidly in that camp; erm, so I think a lot of the people, say, who studied
development with me or my, kind of, friends more generally, they are often, they often take quite an economic perspective on things, where they are concerned about inequality in the world.

He altruistically aimed to combine profit-making social enterprise with practical products to enhance self-determination for poor people in developing countries, particularly via renewable energy. His economics background and commitment to growth relegated environmental protection, so he preferred energy sources supporting growth – polluting or not – and dismissed climate change mitigation on behalf of future generations, given the need to fight poverty in today’s world (illustrated in Chapter 6).

Now the nature of what [the social enterprise he worked with] was trying to do meant that, erm, it wasn’t, as a business, it wasn’t designed to, erm, say, switch people on a wide scale over to renewable energy; the focus was principally people who were either off grid or who had unreliable group suppliers.

There is a tricky trade off in terms of, trying to remedy the, the causative factors around, erm, climate change, and affecting poverty reduction more generally.

Edward was a climate sceptic; Francis and Benjamin accepted the facts of climate change but dismissed their importance. Edward seemed empowered by promoting climate change sceptic opinion, and Benjamin by working for poor people in developing countries. Edward and Francis implicitly subscribed to individualist and self-enhancing interpretive communities; Benjamin’s interpretive community combined individualistic and egalitarian perspectives. The pattern of self-assurance and received economic thinking seems associated with literal denial, as with Edward, or implicatory denial, given how Francis and Benjamin acknowledged potentially man-made climate change but disregarded its implications.

Simon was in literal denial of climate change and was self-assured and empowered but uncommitted to traditional economic thinking. He was proud of and totally committed to his belief and life in the theatre:

As far as I am aware of from what I have read, and understand, it, it is, we can blame humanity, but it is something that is natural; we might have sped up by a few hundred years, but it would have happened; the earth would have warmed up, because it is its natural cycle. You can’t, nothing the race, species would do would change that. It has happened before and it is happening again and it will happen after that; you know, sort of, after a long period of time – it is not the first time it has happened – so, it is just a natural cycle of the earth … So we can’t avoid it.

You get to create something that could potentially change someone else’s life; you can touch someone, you create something that can really make someone think or, or, just feel touched; creating, you are the person that is creating a notion, and that is, that is something quite lovely … You are that part that, you, you create the magic for someone else without them realising.
Optimism and self-assurance

To summarise, some participants manifested a broadly egalitarian combination of optimism, environmentally friendly attitudes, empowered-ness, accepting the influence of interpretive communities, and some self-questioning. Also, optimists talked about parental (often particularly maternal) influences during childhood, talked freely about their families, and came from secure families. As examples of complex and contradictory data, some of these environmentally friendly participants felt entitled to act non-environmentally, perhaps due both to their optimism and to their self-reflexive honesty.

In contrast, the self-assured participants did not manifest optimism, but seemed un-self-questioning (unlike the optimists) and fitted well into an individualist category. Their lack of self-questioning and self-reflexiveness might perhaps be explained by their belonging to the dominant neo-liberal consensus. They had less to say about their upbringing, although nothing they said suggested anything adverse about their family backgrounds.

Dismemberment, pessimism, passivity and helplessness

A majority of participants expressed pessimism and varying degrees of disempowerment. Some saw declining media and public interest in climate change, some experienced an increasing damage to the environment and some were explicitly pessimistic about mitigating climate change. A number hoped that forces outside themselves would bring about mitigating action on climate change, and many of these felt alienated from the social groups or interpretive communities they belonged to.

Media

Gloria and Victor thought about the environment more when it was covered more in the media, and believed that changed political and economic circumstances are responsible for the reduced coverage. Gloria felt that this had influenced her own declining interest:

I myself, I feel like, quite influenced by the media so if I constantly see articles about climate change, er, it, it just keeps reminding me that it is obviously an issue, and, erm, and, yeah, I think that the fact that there hasn’t been very much this year, or at least it has only been about the failure of Copenhagen and the whole climate change email scandal, erm, hasn’t been very encouraging. I guess. Erm. So, yeah, maybe people have just lost a bit of enthusiasm. I mean, I certainly feel slightly less enthusiastic about the whole thing (Yeah) this year.

Victor:
The thing about the environment that is interesting is that, erm, you know, we, I don’t know whether it is because of the crash and the post-2008 world that we are in, you know, it is not, doesn’t seem to be on the agenda any more, you know there was a time in the late Nineties, early 2000s when it very much was, to my mind; and I thought about it more then, probably.

As a journalist, Arthur defended mainstream media for not promoting an environmental agenda, as they needed to preserve a broad appeal and readership:

Perhaps newspapers, erm, all, the media, the mainstream media in particular, are probably quite wary about, erm, reporting a lot on, on that when there are a lot of sceptical people out there; if they are not niche publications, erm, they have to, kind of, they have to have a fairly broad feel; erm, and you know there is jokes about the Guardian being kind of, you know, environmental Taliban or whatever.

Clive thought that the media have suggested that the science is uncertain:

A sort of concerted effort in certain sections of the media and the public in general to say: ‘Nobody knows what is going to happen, there is not evidence of what is going to happen in the future, it is all speculative’, and, assuming that people have vested interests on both sides, and are just, you know, arguing the toss about something that no one really knows about; to say, ‘OK, if this is not decided, if we don’t know that this is definitely going to have this terrible effect’, and so many people are prepared to argue that, ‘OK, it is not significant what is happening, it is not man-made, it is part of a natural cycle’ and what have you, then people are not going to say, ‘OK, just in case that is not the case, let us stop doing all these things; let us find, you know, difficult alternatives to what we are doing now’, rather than, you know, just enjoying life and doing the same things, driving cars, taking trains, all the stuff that we are used to doing, and was sold as, you know, the great, Western version of the American dream, that kind of thing, [unclear] a happy life, and all these wonderful things.

Simon described the media as intentionally guilt-inducing (illustrated in Chapter 6).

Thus people had various, quite contrasting, reservations about how climate change was being reported in the media.

**Social and environmental decline**

Several participants experienced a sense of decline regarding climate change and the environment, either in society or in themselves. Mary partly based her narrative of environmental decline on her view of her father’s industrial and chemical farming processes, and felt that the Midwestern farming environment where she grew up had been degraded:

Now when I visit the farm, up until a few years ago when it was still in the family, erm, I looked out – instead of woods and meadows and streams – I was looking at monotonous, erm, suburbia; and of course it changed everything, the stream became clogged with muskrats and, erm, everything changed drastically with the farm. I remember when I was a child, the cats on our farm – we had a lot of feral and tame cats on our farm – were very healthy; by the time I
left they all had weepy eye problems and all kinds of things, and one can only think that that is on a farm, much more about the water they drink and, and the environment they are living in.

Victor looked back nostalgically to a world in which many people took being self-sufficient for granted. He associated this with his wife’s parents. He saw similarities between earlier generations, who were more self-sufficient, and environmentalists today, and imagined an ideal world in which consumption would become less important:

The difference between our generation – not so much my parents generation but probably the generation before theirs, the grandparents generation – complete lack of awareness of the environment wasn’t an issue, nobody knew about it, erm; but, you know, they grew their own food and they, erm, had a slower pace, arguably; you know, there wasn’t all this information zapping about; there wasn’t the same come consumer pressures to update, erm, you know; that is a more recent thing I would have thought, post-war … They, they were both, certainly in my mum’s mother, erm, who, they, they grew, she grew up, my mother grew up in the north of England and they grew their own vegetables, you know, and, and her father built things and, you know, they, they were sustainable, they were self- sustainable but in a different way, because that is what you did.

He saw a difference between his father’s and his own and the next generation:

He is interested in London; he is interested in, sort of, transport, planes, kind of, how things are made and how, you know, he understands things in terms, you know, how a plane takes off, what engines do, how stuff works, you know; that’s quite interesting – I think our generation knows a lot less about that. You know, we take, you know, we switch things on and they work. Erm, you know, and the next generation down from us will be even more in line to some of that I suspect.

Arthur described what open countryside being swallowed up by urban development felt like:

The town was expanding, so you would see certain parts of the countryside disappear, and then, you know, you, my interest in just the outdoors, the countryside, and coupled with seeing parts of it disappear where I used to walk the dog then, sort of creates, erm – you want to, kind of, sound the alarm for, for the places that you, you have seen wild. You know, even as a five year old kid, you know that a rabbit can’t live underneath a road, a tarmac road, so – and that is quite affecting.

Rosemary recalled a time when she knew what was important and what needed to be done regarding climate change. Now, since the destruction of the World Trade Center and the financial crash, she felt much less certain about anything:

Having got to the age I am at the moment, it is like, you know, I never wanted to be part of a failed generation; I wanted our generation to crack this one, and now I don’t understand how we are going to, and so I feel very humble at the moment; whereas, you know, in the Nineties it was like, ‘Yeah, we know what we are doing, right; we have got a plan’; erm, and, and now I am like, you know, the combination of that – the twin towers was the first whammy, and
then the crash was the second one – the crash revealed, all of us who had been working in finance, for having absolutely [she laughs] no clothes on; because none of us had focused on the totality of finance and the sort of, erm, you know, dynamics going on.

Clive described his own previous idealism and his current sense of disappointment:

\textit{What did you, what were you feeling about it when you were a kid?}

Erm, I think, like, something quite, sort of, optimistic and positive in the way that, you know – if people were good and did what they should do then we could look after the planet and those things. And I have got slightly more cynical and, you know, worried about [he laughs], you know, human nature and, you know, what people can do, and things are likely to happen as I have grown older and I have seen the, kind of, vested interest and the way people are typically about those things. And knowing that not everybody thinks the environment is an important thing and, you know, changing behaviour is important, or will make a difference necessarily.

\textbf{Pessimism}

Some participants were pessimistic about enough being done about climate change to avert environmental catastrophe. Albert veered between feeling pessimistic about anything effective being done about climate change and then avowing a hope that, after all, things could change. He felt at odds with his social environment. Charles described being very unhopeful, and saw himself as different from his social world in his concern about climate change:

I don’t think many people think as much about it as I, you know, go round, I mean – no, I think I am thought of as being a nerd.

Clive expressed frustration and despair that since scientists disagree, people ignore environmental problems, and are unwilling to act to prevent catastrophic climate change. Clive sometimes sounded fatalistic in cultural theory terms. His fatalistic position is illustrated in Chapter 6.

\textbf{Passivity}

A number of participants looked to events and actions outside themselves to prevent catastrophic climate change. Louis felt explicitly disempowered:

Oh yeah, I mean, I am; I am disempowered; I mean, it is a, I mean, empowerment is political, it is basically politics.

\textit{And economic, yeah.}

It is, sort of, it is a – politics is about power, isn’t it? And, erm, I personally am not a particularly powerful individual; erm, so, apart from my own personal energy to do stuff – but, if I become part of a group, then, then there is more power there.

Karen explicitly dreaded but was fascinated by the possibility of catastrophic events:
I like to know, you know, like, the information. It is like, you know, where would be the right place to be if something was to happen; you know, that kind of a thing, you know. I mean, how I get to Mexico is beyond me, but, you know, you just go, you know – I need to know that, that kind of thing, or if the Thames floods, like that film, Flood [she laughs].

As illustrated in Chapter 6, so was Albert:

I suppose, I don't know, along with, I gather it’s a significant segment of the population, I enjoy, or think I enjoy, disaster scenarios.

As illustrated in Chapter 6, Victor might have been disguising a fear of catastrophe with an ironic approach to ‘lots of death’. He thought that the government should to take more of a lead:

I am convinced that government has made mistakes and has done pretty rubbish things along the way, erm, but I think, you know, it can still be a vehicle for incredible good. If it is brave.

So did Pamela:

I think that cycling provision in this country can start to make an impact on how much, on our carbon emissions; as far as that is concerned, I think that the government has to do something to help people, erm, have double glazing and loft insulation.

David and Victor both toyed with the idea that an authoritarian government could take more effective action on climate change. As illustrated in Chapter 6, Victor avoided talking directly about pleasing the electorate in order to be re-elected, with ironic language like ‘tricky’ and ‘works a treat’.

As illustrated in Chapter 6, David questioned democracy and played with the idea that the Chinese government could take decisions that democratic governments can’t or won’t, but admitted that this could be part of his dissociated attitude.

Peers and social groups

This section reviews the way that various participants see the influence of their peers, the social worlds they see themselves as part of, and the view of society they hold, in relation to climate change and the environment.

Participants’ social environments and peers

In Chapter 3 I outline how Norgaard’s (2011) research emphasised the pressures to conform to social norms that prevent awareness and discussion of the effects of climate change, and Lorenzoni, Nicholson-Cole and Whitmarsh (2007) described how their participants belong to and are influenced by interpretive or cultural communities. Brian, Gloria and Nora acknowledged the influence of their
friends, relations and associates. Arthur, Brian and Victor recognised their social or ideological communities sharing similar environmental values, but felt no pressures to conform. Benjamin, Edward and Simon were sceptics and belonged to groups with shared values. Although they seemed not to have been influenced by peer groups, they may have been subject to unconscious pressures. They could all be described as belonging to interpretive communities.

Clive, Charles, Karen and Louis were environmentally minded and felt dissociated from their social groups regarding environmental issues. Albert and Louis seemed alienated from their social worlds. Brian felt less environmental than his student peer group; Francis distinguished his own position from that of his colleagues and denied any social pressures. Arguably, many participants manifest the influence of the sorts of interpretive communities and cultural affiliations that cultural theory describes.

Environmentally oriented people seemed more likely to be interested in their influence with their peers and vice versa. These mutual influences would be examples of interpretive communities, and suggest egalitarianism (see Chapter 3). Brian felt part of a like-minded social circle:

I would say that most people in my social network are on the same page as I am, you know, in terms of, green things are clearly important, and there are no climate change deniers. So people accept climate change; they accept it’s anthropogenic; they accept that it is escalating, and that we need to do something about it; and people are responding in different, to different degrees … We are, we are all in much the same space.

He felt strongly influenced by the idealistic, younger fellow students on his recent development course, which perhaps reflected his own idealism – self-transcending, according to Schwartz. He felt that he was insufficiently out of the ordinary over climate change engagement:

Going and doing this course, that was a huge discovery. Because there you are surrounded by mainly academic literature; and be–, you know, a group of 22- to 35-year-olds, who would be more passionately committed to the whole environmental and ecological argument than I was on entry.

Are you regarded as strange among your friends and relations?
I think I’m not. No, I don’t think I am seen as strange. I think that is a cause for concern, not a cause for congratulation. What it means is that I’m not doing, I’m not living, I’m not living the life, I’m not walking the talk. I’m talking it but I’m not walking it.

Gloria described a contradiction between her humanitarian, environmental interests, and the more hedonistic activities of her friends with little interest in the environment. The pressure to conform to the activities of her social group demonstrates how an interpretive community (Norgaard 2011) influences its members. She could be seen as in conflict between self-transcendence and self-enhancement (Schwartz and Bardi 2001):
I mean, it was never really an issue: I was into the same things as they were, you know [laughs] – sport and drinking and all that, erm – but I always like to fill my time, I guess with, I don’t know; I’d always shown a bit more interest in the world, like, you know, like reading the news and taking part in different demonstrations and things, and, no, I mean, I just sort of got my friends to come along if they wanted to, I mean I, I don’t know.

Victor felt that he belonged to a middle-class group who subscribed to mostly environmental values, existing in a sort of bubble. As illustrated in Chapter 6, he would conform to a societal decision to act in environmentally friendly ways, but would not act individually, or take a lead:

Most people in my generation are very good at recycling – actually not in my generation – but we then are, sort of [he laughs], a bubble within the society.

Arthur felt that he had a circle of friends who broadly subscribed to the same environmental values as him:

My friends definitely have an awareness of the environment; so I have friends that might go, they won’t go on a package holiday to, you know, to Spain; they would go, erm, and maybe, do a bit of volunteering, or, erm, you know, go and, go and watch whales, knowing that they are contributing to, erm, safeguarding of species, because they are helping to put a price on nature, and they make ethical decisions about where they go on holiday, but ultimately they, they, it is very difficult to get there ethically, to get there in a way that isn’t going to contribute to, erm, a warming climate.

Charles, Karen and Louis were all more environmentally minded than their social networks. Charles felt on his own in his social world in being concerned about climate change (illustrated above in 3. Disempowerment, pessimism, passivity and helplessness c. Pessimism).

Louis felt alienated from the wider society:

What is the average person’s goal in life? Well, you know, most people would say, you know, to have a family, and sort of bring up a family and all the rest of it; you know, not necessarily everyone has to have children and that kind of thing; you know, socially, it shouldn’t maybe be seen so much as the only goal, or the main desire; so much stuff is infrastructurally around, erm, integrated around that, you know, you assume that, you know, capitalism is selling, selling things based around the couple and, the family and, then everything leading into, into this.

Karen represented the disagreement between herself and her boyfriend over recycling, implicitly drawing attention to a difference between herself and her cultural milieu:

You know, my boyfriend, he thinks I’m nuts half the time, when I … Erm; he’s like, one of those, but, erm, like getting him to recycle is murder enough, you know, that type of a thing, he, ‘Oh well, they will sort it out when they get it to the depot anyway’, you know, ‘Why do we have to separate ours out?’ Well, it will save them a bit of time, you know, that way, for
the people that don’t bother, they have got them there, you know, that kind of a thing; but, 
erm, there are a lot of people out there, who do still feel like he does.

All these participants belonged to egalitarian or self-transcending interpretive communities, and could be seen as self-questioning.

Committed environmentalists

Committed environmentalists, including those who forswear flying, draw attention to conflicts that other people feel, so people distance themselves in various ways, disparaging or ridiculing friends and relations who challenge social norms with a committed environmental stance. This recalls Zerubavel’s (2006) account of the sanctions that are applied to silence breakers (see Chapter 3). Pamela, David, Edward and Louis described committed environmentalists as crazy, hysterics, misanthropic, fundamentalist, or judgmental, arguably manifesting their conformity to interpretive communities (Norgaard 2011; Lorenzoni, Nicholson-Cole and Whitmarsh 2007). Their reactions could be what Randall (2005) describes as a response to a distressing truth that has to be assimilated, leading to a split in the ego, or Marris’s (1982) description of interruptions in structures of meaning that cause anxiety and bewilderment.

Holly and Pamela aspired to an environmentally friendly life. Holly thought she might be mocked for her modified environmental stance, but made fun of her environmentally committed sister- and brother-in-law. Pamela saw herself as hypocritical for using air travel for weekend breaks. Holly, Victor and Arthur expressed a guarded admiration for people who take a committed stance. Holly, Pamela, Gloria and Louis did not want to be thought of as preaching to their friends. Victor seemed to be postponing to a future date a decision to cut down on flying. Arthur described the contradictions that friends and relations faced over flying: he himself had to fly in order to pursue environmental journalism, and his friends flew to ‘environmental’ holidays. Thus committed environmentalists pinpoint the conflict for people between being environmentally aware and confronting non-environmental cultural values.

Committed environmentalists: negative views

As illustrated in Chapter 6, Pamela described how militants can be perceived as crazy, and David saw activism as leading to woolly thinking; in that way he ruled out any sort of activism.

Edward, illustrated in Chapter 6, portrayed environmentalists as alarmist, charlatans, subconsciously hating humanity and behaving discredibly. As he did not reveal his own background, I had no theories concerning why he saw environmentalists in such an extreme light.
Louis wanted to avoid the fundamentalist judgmental stance he saw in other people, also referred to in Chapter 6.

Environmentalists: cautious admiration

Holly, Victor and Arthur admired people that have made a serious commitment to environmental values, including not flying.

As described in Chapter 5, Holly had been strongly influenced by her husband’s sister and her partner. Recycling was a kind of core value for her (like Haidt’s sanctity/degradation polarity, see Chapter 3).

Victor implicitly admired his less materialistic, non-flying friends:

There are one or two notable exceptions that have decided that, ‘Right, we are going to be a bit different about this’, erm, you know. I think there is one couple in particular, you know, they have decided to do things in a different way; I mean, part of the repercussions of deciding to do things in a different way is that they have got jobs where actually, perhaps, flying and doing some of these isn’t much of an option … They are not income obsessed – they don’t, you know, I mean they don’t – they are just consuming less. They are not so bothered.

Arthur described the contradiction between his and other people’s environmentalism and his need to travel by air for his work, or for holidays, incidentally implicating me in his transference, as illustrated in Chapter 6.

I know people that have, that will not fly because they don’t want to, you know, contribute to global warming; so, I have, erm, my ex girlfriend’s mum, erm, actually wanted to go on holiday to Italy, you know; she was going by train, and that was the only way because she wasn’t going to contribute, but most people – you know, she would be one of the exceptions rather than the rule – have a fairly cavalier sort of attitude about it, and erm; it is interesting that people, you know, get annoyed that they cannot get, erm, flights from here to Barcelona for fifteen quid really. I am, yeah definitely it is on some people’s radars really.

Campaigning

As illustrated in Chapter 5, Holly refused to become involved in campaigning. Pamela felt militant about cycling and the way car drivers treat cyclists. Rosemary had been convinced about mitigating climate change but had had a crisis of confidence. Karen campaigned in a minor way over the use of plastic bags. Only Edward campaigned wholeheartedly for an unequivocal climate change sceptic position.

Pamela, brought up in deep country, content with living in the inner city, had strong feelings about cycling and the way that motorists sometimes treat cyclists:
I think it is immoral that some people sit in a massive car and they are one person and they are driving, you know, half an hour across London … I am just one person and you have, you’re taking up four cyclists’ space in a massive car that is polluting the atmosphere.

So you can feel angry about environmental issues?

Oh yeah definitely. I think that’s much more like, like I am, I suppose it is like higher – you know, I get on my high horse about anything, like, ‘don’t push me’ and don’t, you know, ‘don’t get angry at me’.

I illustrated above (in 3. Disempowerment, pessimism, passivity and helplessness b. Social and environmental decline) how Rosemary recalled when she knew what was important and needed to be done about climate change. Now, since the destruction of the World Trade Center and the financial crash, she felt much less certain about anything.

Karen dealt with environmental issues at her work via the metaphor of plastic supermarket shopping bags:

I do not mind doubling up bags now, but, erm, the other bags, they weren’t recyclable, they weren’t biodegradable, you know, that kind of thing, so, you just think to yourself, you know; I mean, fair enough, I do kind of joke with them, the customers, you know, like, they are saving the planet, and it is like – ‘Yeah, one tree at a time’ – you know, that sort of a thing, but there is, there is monumental amounts of waste, you know.

I described in Chapter 6 how Edward was committed to campaigning on behalf of climate change sceptics and felt that everybody should follow suit.

Environmentally friendly social networks

Victor, Arthur and Brian all belonged to like-minded social groups, and though under no apparent pressure, they could seem to be conforming to their interpretive communities, egalitarian in cultural theory terms.

As illustrated above (in 4. Peers and social groups a. Participants’ social environments and peers), Victor saw himself as within a middle-class bubble of people who recycle. As illustrated above, he was willing to conform to a societal decision to act in environmentally friendly ways, but not individually, not take a lead.

I illustrated above how Arthur’s friends tried to act environmentally but continually faced dilemmas and choices. As illustrated earlier, Brian felt part of a like-minded social circle.
Denial of social pressures

I described in Chapter 5 how Francis and Holly minimised or dismissed the extent to which they felt subject to pressures to behave in socially accepted ways, and felt sanctioned to act in environmentally harmful ways. Francis presented environmental behaviour as simply a matter of individual choice, disregarding family, economic, and social pressures on the individual. Holly perhaps wanted to appear to be more of an environmentalist than she was, denying her non-environmental behaviour.

Climate change sceptic social networks

I illustrated Benjamin’s and Edward’s positions above (in 2. Empowered optimists, self-assurance d. Self-assurance). Benjamin’s friends had similar views to him, and agreed with his distinction between environmental and economic. His social group conforms to Lorenzoni’s description of interpretive communities. He could be seen as individualist or hierarchist in cultural theory terms. Edward was a climate change sceptic and represented himself as independent minded, but he admitted that there is considerable climate change scepticism within his social circle, and he may have been more a member of an interpretive community than he admitted to himself. He could be classified as an individualist and hierarchist in terms of cultural theory.

Those separated from social networks

Clive, Charles and Karen felt that they did not fit in with their social groups or interpretive communities, or were at odds with them, partly because of their concern about climate change or recycling. Albert found it difficult to find people that he could have a serious conversation with, Francis felt apart from his public sector colleagues who lacked private sector awareness and experience, while Louis felt alienated from a domestic and consumerist world. However Brian felt he was less separate from his cultural group of friends than he should be.

Clive pessimistically argued that since scientists disagree, people ignore environmental problems, so as not to have to change anything. He sometimes sounded fatalistic in cultural theory terms. Charles felt on his own in his social world in his concern about climate change. (I illustrated Clive’s and Charles’s positions above in Disempowerment, pessimism, passivity and helplessness)

Karen represented the disagreement (described above) between herself and her boyfriend over recycling, implicitly drawing attention to a difference between herself and her cultural milieu. Brian felt that he was insufficiently out of the ordinary over climate change engagement. (I illustrated
Karen’s and Brian’s positions above in 4. Peers and social groups a. Participants’ social environments and peers.)

Albert was negative about his social group:

*Do you think you feel differently, coming from a scientific background, to somebody who’s the general public, you know, who largely has to say, ‘Our scientists, they must know what they’re talking about’?*

I don’t know. I don’t know what the general public thinks actually. I, certainly in my social network, they don’t talk about it. I don’t think they bother. I don’t think people bother to talk about it, actually, they just get on with what they’re doing.

I illustrated in Chapter 5 how Francis saw his colleagues as having a limited, simplistic perspective because of their lack of experience of the world outside the university.

Louis described his resistance to a social world he is not part of. He sees family life as domestic and inescapably consumerist:

> The family, the social structure of the family, that is predominant, you know: the family home and bringing up children and, erm, you know, fitting your home out full of stuff that you need so you are going to look – you are perceived to need to bring up, to have a family and, you know, that kind of thing. And also, it is quite, the nucleated family as opposed to a communal family.

**Interpretive communities and cultural theory**

There are associations between those who are themselves, or who admire, the environmentally committed, and the interpretive community, in cultural theory terms, that they belong to. Brian, Arthur and Victor were all broadly egalitarian in cultural theory terms, environmentally minded and belonged to like-minded social or peer groups. Arthur and Holly additionally admired fully committed environmentalists. Those, like Benjamin and Edward, who rejected or ridiculed environmentalists, could be seen as predominantly individualist and hierarchist in terms of cultural theory, were sceptics and belonged to groups with shared values. They seem not to have experienced peer pressures consciously, but may have been subject to them unconsciously.

Some participants felt separate from their peer group or interpretive community. Clive, Charles, Karen, and Louis were also broadly egalitarian and more environmentally minded than – and felt dissociated from – the social groups or interpretive communities they belonged to. Francis was hierarchist and individualist and disavowed being affiliated to an interpretive community or having concerns about climate change. He denied any social pressures.
However, with some participants there was no correspondence between cultural theory affiliations, interpretive communities and thoughts and feelings about the environment. Simon could be seen as egalitarian and strongly part of a theatrical interpretive community, but was a sceptic regarding climate change. Gloria had egalitarian but also individualist leanings in cultural theory terms; she was environmentally minded, but belonged to a non-environmental interpretive community. David seemed to have no interpretive community, had some environmental interests, was partly egalitarian in cultural theory terms but criticised committed environmentalists.

There is thus some correspondence between association with interpretive communities, cultural theory positions, and thoughts and feelings regarding the environment – but a number of participants do not conform to this, and illustrate that thoughts and feelings about climate change can be complex.

**Peer groups and interpretive communities: some conclusions**

I therefore conclude that the interpretive communities that people belong to play an important part in their thoughts and feelings about climate change and the environment. When people seem not to have been influenced, it may well be that they were unconsciously affected. Even those like Albert and Louis, who seemed removed and dissociated from any interpretive community, can be seen as rejecting and feeling alienated by their social worlds.

‘It’s complicated’

This section illustrates the many ways in which participants manifested contradictory thoughts and feelings about climate change and the environment. These were to do with their sense of entitlement, particularly as regards flying, the environmental implications of wealth and poverty, and the way that recycling and shopping habits express environmental values.

**Entitlement, conspicuous consumption**

The behaviour that Karen and Victor both identified could be interpreted as what Veblen (1994: 43–62) described as ‘conspicuous consumption’. Karen could not understand why people needed to make very large amounts of money and could not act altruistically.

It makes me laugh, because, you know, you’ve got all these rich, rich people, erm, that have the money there, to make change; they have got enough to live on, you know, especially the multimillionaires, I mean they have got enough to live on, you are not going to take it with you, you know; if you want to [unclear] to a funeral, take a few grand out of that, put it to one side, in a bank, right, ‘That’s for my funeral’: by the time you die, your money is there, you have got a great big funeral paid for already, you know, that kind of a thing; you know, I mean I can’t see the point of having to make that much money.
Victor distinguished between earning below a certain point, which is ‘a nightmare’, and earning above that point, where people have enough, so they are tempted to spend more on a slightly larger house or car:

You are always, you manage on what you earn whether you are earning, above a certain point, you know, if you are earning half a million or you are earning fifty grand, you know, you sort of, like, you are always: below it is a nightmare, you know, below a certain point it is very difficult; above a certain point it is completely irrelevant. It doesn’t matter, you know, and then everybody else is sort of like, ‘Well I will just have that slightly bigger house, I will just have that slightly newer, erm, Mercedes’, whatever.


Rosemary described her powerfully mixed feelings about giving up a developing career in green finance in East Asia in order to support her emotionally troubled son. She showed how hard it is to separate family concerns from questions of self-confidence:

I could have made big contributions to [politics and financial services] by staying in Asia; I know I could; erm, and; you know, you could – in the end you put the things you really love first, and, and that is what I did; erm, I think that if, you know, I have obviously thought a lot about this, and in, there is also a bit that has to be, I have to be honest about, is that, erm, erm, you know, in a way, there were, erm, I – and I am sure this happens, that this happens with lots of people who [unclear] find themselves sort of moving more and more into a more prominent, erm, I don’t know, public life role, public in the broadest sense … It is that you have some fears about what you don’t know, and, I think what I, erm, didn’t have – and I only understand now, and maybe if I had sorted that out, you know, I could have managed the continuing in Asia and still being able to be, do what was right for [her son] – is that I just didn’t have sufficient mentoring support around me; I was, I did feel very isolated and that makes you frightened; it does, so … I think there was a tiny part of, ‘I’m coming back to Britain because I am a bit frightened of the levels I am getting caught up in’, and that has to be, that was, in the mix somewhere. Does that sound reality?

Arthur described the contradictions of his position as regards having to travel a lot for work and, as illustrated earlier and in Chapter 6, felt he could not criticise others for travelling to go on holiday:

I still would have an appreciation of cars, and I might laugh at Jeremy Clarkson’s jokes occasionally, even though I think he is you know, an idiot; but ultimately –
He is very funny.
Yeah, he is funny. I mean you know, he does make me laugh. Yeah, there is a contradiction there I guess, and there is a contradiction with the fact that being a journalist I do travel quite a lot too.
Yes, I was wondering about that: air travel and all that, yeah.
Yeah, and, so there are always contradictions, erm, and it is, it is, you know, ultimately I have become an environmental journalist and not a motoring journalist because that is, that is really what I believe in more than I believe in cars or whatever.

I am a big advocate of travel and I would encourage people to travel; erm, but on the other hand, travel, by its very nature, erm, involves generally burning a lot of aviation fuel; erm, so, it is, it is quite difficult to, to, to balance really.

I have recorded above Victor’s feelings about flying to India and his disregard for the environmental consequences. He graphically described the contradiction between knowing what he was doing and preferring not to think about it, which I quoted as an example of disavowal in Chapter 6.

Having contradictory feelings and views about climate change and the environment was particularly marked among environmentalists who had great difficulty in giving up the idea of flying.

Participants’ internal contradictions described and illustrated above suggest that mainstream, middle-of-the-road people have not fully adopted explicit environmental positions. It is also noticeable that even those with quite strong environmental leanings distanced themselves – from talking to, or ‘lecturing’ as they framed it, their friends on environmental issues, and from people who had made firm ‘way-of-life’ commitments to pro-environmental action.

**Wealth and poverty**

Some participants believed that an environmentally friendly life is more expensive and harder to sustain on a low income. Charles realised the difficulty of acting environmentally on a low income:

> I think it depends a great deal on the amount of, stress there is on people. You see, middle-class people can change … It is harder for people who are poor, who are the people who of course are most stressed.

Nora illustrated the difficulties of making environmentally friendly choices with limited financial resources, illustrating this by the example of nappies, made worse by her guilt about not acting environmentally:

> Before I had [son’s name], I thought, ‘Oh, I should, I’m going to get those nappies that are cloth’ … but they were so expensive, and then, so, I’ve been on income support since I had him … I got some, and I thought, ‘That’s what I’m going to do, and then I won’t be using disposable nappies that go into landfill and that will be good’, but when it came to it, it was so much work having him, and trying to work out what to do with him … I suppose, busy all the time, I thought, ‘I can’t wash nappies, and I can’t’ – they have a laundry service you can pay, but I couldn’t afford to pay them, and I thought … ‘Oh no’; the reality of it is really difficult and I thought, ‘Well, my mum did it’, because she, it was more common to have those Terry nappies then … No, I just couldn’t; so I ended up buying disposable nappies, and then of course you can buy the eco-friendly disposable nappies, but they are so expensive compared
Almost all participants thought that making people better off will enable environmental action generally. Arthur felt that people’s economic circumstances would govern their approach to climate change and the environment:

[His father] is now a driving instructor; erm; but he is, you know, he has got solar panels on his roof because he, erm, you know, not because he doesn’t want to burn fossil fuels, more because he wants to save money, and I think that is, that’s the key there really; because if you, if you want to engage people that perhaps ordinarily wouldn’t have, necessarily a belief in climate change or a will to reverse it, or whatever. I think, trying to, trying to make it more attractive financially, to make the right decisions, is the way to go.

Know it is hard, for example, erm, getting people to buy organic food – why are they going to buy, they are not going to spend more on organic food, you know; when I, when I was struggling to, as, as a student, there is no way I was going to buy organic food; I didn’t have any work, I wasn’t going to buy organic food, and I, you want to, you are aware that, but there is no amount of cultural shift that is going to make you think, ‘Well, I am going to spend twenty quid more on my shopping’.

Gloria was unhappy about disparities between the living standards of western development workers and those of people in developing countries, but having grown up in a developed country, was not willing to accept a lower standard of living:

There are lots of expats in the Philippines, you know, working for these different development agencies and, you know, they head up the NGOs and stuff, when those jobs could easily be taken by Filipinos. So yes, it’s like robbing people of jobs, when it’s a bit unnecessary, because you are al—, always going to get paid a lot more than them; and yes, it is not really fair, I guess.

I want to work in development, but I am always going to want to get paid properly for it. Erm. And so should you be, you know, should you be paid for, for doing charity work, which has traditionally just been done in the community.

Mm.

Erm, so, yeah, I think that is hard … I guess it’s just another one of those, those contradictions, like you, it just doesn’t feel moral in a way –

Mm.

And especially if you are in a developing country because you are going to get paid more than, you know, a lot better than a local would.

Pamela accepted that she sometimes acts non-environmentally on the grounds of cost:

It is difficult when you are in the supermarket and, you know, the fruit that is in front of you – I try and buy as much British or, or more local European than buying New Zealand and [unclear] apples for instance and things like that – but again it is very easy to be hypocritical about that when price comes into it.
Mary, an American, after many years now had no work in the UK, so she was returning to the USA, where she had found satisfying work and security. As illustrated in Chapter 6, she felt vulnerable and could only concentrate on her own survival.

Victor described how some might act environmentally for economic reasons:

You see taxis in [East London], you know, Asian taxi-drivers in hybrid cars because – not because they are dyed-in-the-wool, left-of-centre, erm, [laughs] environmentalists but because … cheap to run.

Holly said she had lots of money but was unsure that she had always been thoughtful about her choices, as illustrated in Chapter 5:

I don’t think it’s something that used to impinge on my consciousness nearly as much as it does now, but can I pinpoint moments, that is; not really. My sister-in-law acquiring her partner, who is fanatical about it, certainly made all of us in the family slightly reassess ourselves.

Edward did not believe that wide disparities between rich and poor are detrimental:

I have never been worried by disparities, I am much more concerned about absolutes. If one end of society is fifty times wealthier than the other end, I don’t think that that matters, provided that the other end is improving – in part because of the efforts of those at the wealthy end. I do believe in wealth generation … Living today, in 2010, you ought to look and see how it was for your parents and grandparents. And there is absolutely no comparison, if you take a country like Ireland, it is absolutely extraordinary. I have been going to Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, for many, many years on business and the change there has been absolutely astonishing; in two generations from real death-creating poverty to real prosperity, and the continuation of improvement.

As illustrated in Chapter 5, Francis identified economic inequalities at an impersonal, global level, between individuals and between societies, but he avowed faith in market forces as a means for distributing resources.

Both well-off and poorer participants explained non-environmental behaviour as due to their, or other people’s, either wealth or poverty: they could both be cited as reasons to act non-environmentally. The well-off could justify non-environmental behaviour simply because they could afford it; the hard-up could say that they could not afford to spend money in environmentally friendly ways. So in practice an individual’s wealth or poverty is not the principal issue as regards action on climate change.
Individual action: recycling, eco-friendly shopping

Recycling

Some participants supported recycling because it was self-evidently right. Nora showed that for some it involves thought, time and organisation. Victor showed that some people feel that it is limited to an environmentally concerned middle-class group. Arthur could see how recycling could be a way to avoid taking more important action. I discuss the relationship between recycling as practical action and recycling as a metaphor for taking action in Chapter 10.

As illustrated in Chapter 5, Holly had a strong emotional commitment to recycling which contrasted with her firm attachment to flying and heli-skiing, and her ambivalence about her environmentally committed relations. Victor saw himself as within a middle-class bubble of people who recycle, illustrated above (in Participants’ social environments and peers). Both Karen and Nora were in poorer economic circumstances and were unaware of climate change and the effects of discharging carbon dioxide into the atmosphere; yet both were committed to recycling and both struggled with the practical difficulties and the resistance or opposition of friends and family. I illustrated how Karen dealt with environmental issues at her work via the metaphor of plastic supermarket shopping bags above (in Committed environmentalists). Karen represented the disagreement between herself and her boyfriend over recycling, implicitly drawing attention to a difference between herself and her cultural milieu (see above, 4. Peers and social groups a. Participants’ social environments and peers).

Nora graphically described her difficulties and guilt about recycling:

I live on an estate now, so the recycling bins have been placed – they are not in the estate, they are on the streets … So I think ‘OK, I must remember; I think it might be something to put that in’. Then erm, you know, if I remember to take it with me then I will drop it off in the bin. It doesn’t sound very difficult, does it? But I find that I forget, and I end up with – and there is no storage in this flat – and I end up with carrier bags full of recycling stuff in my toilet, and I think, ‘Oh, got to get rid of that’; and sometimes I think, ‘Oh, I can’t, I’ll just have to put it in the bin’; I think, ‘No! You can’t do that, that is terrible’, you know.

She had some non-environmental friends but her environmental friends seemed to have more influence on her:

I think, well, you know, is that, my friend, my friend never recycles anything ever; and, she says, ‘Oh, [unclear]’ … I said ‘Yes, but if everyone else thought … no one would do it, and then nothing will ever get done’ … So, I thought, ‘So, I am letting the recycling down’.

Oh, my friends does it, my friend Tish is great, in fact Don is so good at recycling that someone from [an East London] Council said they were going to put his name down as [an
East London Borough] Recycling Champion. They drink a lot of wine, so there is always a lot of wine bottles outside which they laugh about – they must think we are alcoholics – but they do recycle.

Pamela:

I just remember, erm, becoming quite obsessed about recycling as I got older and, and, you know, wherever I lived, always knowing what the recycling facilities were and things like that.

As illustrated above (in 4. Peers and social groups a. Participants’ social environments and peers), Victor saw himself as within a middle-class bubble of people who recycle.

Arthur thought that recycling could be used as an excuse for non-environmental behaviour:

I think recycling kind of embodies that, erm, that idea that you can actually see, you can see that big bin full, filled with stuff, thinking, ‘Oh, that is not rubbish, it is recycling’; erm, but also with recycling it is something that is easy to do and people, can kind of, perhaps, erm, perhaps it is not a good thing in terms of attitudes because – Well, that is, that is the ambivalent question, because you can pat yourself on the back for doing it, you know, but at least you are, you are keeping something in mind, I suppose, about the environment and about this; so I think it is rather ambivalent really in that sense.

No, definitely. You know, people might kind of think, well, I will fly to Barbados, fine, so, so I will recycle my newspaper and milk cartons, you know; so there is some danger of that happening perhaps, but, erm; you know, things, you have to start small with these kind of things.

Shopping

A number of participants described choices they faced between cheaper purchases and more expensive eco-friendly items, and how when they were not well off they might buy less environmentally friendly items on cost grounds.

Nora described her struggles over providing for her small son on a low income:

Well, OK, sausages is a good example. If you buy sausages in Iceland they just taste horrible, and there is hardly any meat in them; and then if you buy proper sausages which have got 70% meat – because I was think– ‘I don’t want to feed him that rubbish. I want him to eat proper sausages’. But they cost, say, three pounds, whereas rubbish sausages cost a pound: you get a big bag full of them. So in fact what you do, well I, I buy proper sausages. But, yeah, so Iceland to me is a little bit like that – that everything is very cheap but the reason why it is very cheap when you look at what is actually in it, there is lots of added things that are not real, you know, that are not going to do him any good.

As illustrated above (in Wealth and poverty), Pamela described her conflict between shopping environmentally and buying what is affordable, and Arthur described his shopping as a student.
Conclusions

Thus three broad patterns emerge from these quite complicated findings as regards my participants’ thoughts and feelings about their social and economic circumstances in relation to climate change and the environment. First, there is a fairly sharp divide between those who feel optimistic and empowered to take action, and those who feel pessimistic and disempowered. Feeling optimistic and empowered is in many cases linked with and perhaps based on early experiences of a close relationship with an enthusiastic and active parent. Paradoxically, it seems as though feeling empowered is also often associated with feeling entitled to act in non-environmental ways. My main climate change sceptic, involved in promoting the cause of scepticism, also felt empowered. Feeling disempowered was associated with less positive social attitudes towards the environment, the desire for leadership, the questioning of climate science, and doubts about the role of the media. This seemed to be founded on a perception of the individual finding it difficult to relate to his or her social environment and to a greater or less extent being alienated from it.

Second, as indicated above there is some correspondence between interpretive communities, cultural theory positions, and thoughts and feelings regarding the environment. This suggests that people’s thoughts and feelings about climate change and the environment can be strongly influenced by the interpretive communities that they belong to.

However, a number of participants do not conform to this pattern, which illustrates how thoughts and feelings about climate change can be complex. When people seem not to have been influenced, it may well be that they were in fact unconsciously affected. Even those like Albert and Louis, who seemed removed and dissociated from any interpretive community, can be seen as rejecting and feeling alienated by their social worlds.

Third, all participants found themselves feeling and acting in contradictory ways, and feeling to a greater or lesser extent divided within themselves. However, climate change sceptics and participants who broadly subscribed to the dominant neo-liberal economic consensus seemed to experience less doubt and inner conflict. Generally though, people are complicated. The finding above, that empowered optimists often feel entitled to act non-environmentally, illustrates this. Many participants explicitly acknowledged their feelings and behaviour as contradictory. People on low incomes, now or in the past, expressed the difficulties of choosing more expensive but more environmentally friendly products; but although almost everyone suggested that people being materially better off would bring about changed thoughts and feelings about climate change and the environment, both being well off and also being hard up were used to justify non-environmental behaviour – which suggests that people
are not just governed by material concerns. Participants’ widely divergent attitudes towards recycling, practically and metaphorically, suggest the complexity and ambiguity of the case.
Chapter 8: The Influence of Early Life Experiences

This chapter analyses the links between my participants’ early relationships with their parents, the physical environment of their childhoods, and their thoughts and feelings about the environment. Often a rural childhood environment, together with a mother’s or grandmother’s influence, coincided with an interest in the environment. However, satisfactory parental relationships can of course also influence non-environmental adult concerns. Even where parental relationships had not been satisfactory, a rural upbringing could be connected with an environmental interest. Correspondingly, participants brought up with little exposure to rural life during childhood were often uninterested in environmental concerns.

Though I explicitly referred to the aim of investigating the effect of family and personal development influences in my research aims (outlined in Chapter 1), I did not expect these findings; yet others have thought that they could have been anticipated. In spite of drawing on psychoanalytic theory in analysing the psychology of climate change denial, it did not occur to me to consider my participants’ early relationships with parental figures, or their links to their environmental matrices, their childhood ‘native heaths’ or rural or urban environments. Given that psychoanalysis is founded on the theory that we are powerfully influenced by our early relationships, this was a surprising theoretical deficiency which I will return to in Chapter 9, reviewing my analysis of my findings.


Environmentalism, country upbringing, activist parent

Pamela, Rosemary, Arthur and Clive each described their strong link as children with a mother or grandmother who passed on her own enthusiasm about environmental concerns. They were brought up in the country or in the suburbs with countryside access. Karen lived in the inner city, but knew a rural part of Ireland where her family stemmed from. They implicitly expressed a view of nature as
integral to mind and society, as Guattari (2008), Bateson (2000), and Kumar (2013) suggest (see Chapter 3). Possibly a good relationship with a mother is linked to the feeling for archetypal Mother Earth that Ryland (2000) and Randall (2005) describe. Pamela, Rosemary, Arthur and Karen, though not Clive, were attached to a particular natural environment, which Birkeland (2005) and Bodnar (2008) suggested is connected to an environmental sense.

Karen was probably born and brought up in inner-city London, and not educated beyond secondary level. She lived in an inner-city area and worked in a supermarket. She was in touch with her extended family in rural Ireland, and her long-term aim was to move to live with her family in rural Ireland. Her dog connected her with the animal world. She did not know what causes environmental change, but was environmentally concerned:

No, I do like to, to think, that something that, you know, it’s, you know, out there that will, you know, be able to fix what we done, you know. But, I mean, it’s not a case of, we have only just started, you know, destroying the planet – it has been going on for years. And when Britain was having coal fires and, you know, things like that – I mean pollution was a hell of a lot worse than it is now. But then you think to yourself, ‘Well, that it is a different kind of pollution’: you have got the pollution from the cars, because they didn’t have cars in those days, and, you know, that sort of a thing, you know, so, it, it does stem from other things.

Her environmentalism may be linked with her association with rural Ireland, coupled with a traumatic response to her husband’s sudden death:

When, like I say, someone that close to you, it does; I mean, I know people around me died, you know, and, and I have been upset, you know, that kind of a thing, and never really thought about it. But, erm, like I say, three years after he died, it was like I was so worried about everything – you know, I wouldn’t go anywhere just in case – and the most safety person; my children are the only children that never climb trees. Erm, never walked along the street without holding hands, just in case they tripped and fell, or just in case they run out into the road, or, you know, that kind of a thing. I tell you anywhere you can see an accident, I will see it [short laugh].

I would like to move to Ireland, obviously, to be with my family; because the grand plan had always been that – when the youngest one had finished university, erm – I would go; because I wasn’t, you know, I hate it here, I absolutely hate it here; you know, all you can see is flats, flats, flats, you know.

You still feel that?

Erm, yeah; erm, yeah, it’s, it’s – I suppose if I lived out in the countryside, or that kind of thing, something you can escape to, like even a back garden; you know, you could escape out into. I mean I have got, like my flat, I am on the, it is only two floors, obviously, and I am on the second floor, and I have got like big windows, and there is houses, terraced houses, and there is one that’s got the, gap, where they haven’t built up, [unclear] and there’s a park – just over there, you know – be honest, and all you can see is this little, you know, like, kind of a picture frame.

Yeah, exactly.

And I used to sit there for hours, just sitting there like that staring out the window, you know, in the evening when it was in the summer, just looking out that little.
Pamela was brought up in deep country. Her mother died when she was an infant and her father was mentally ill, so she had a very difficult childhood. As a result she developed considerable maturity and insight. Her environmental commitment was associated with her close relationship with her grandmother, who mainly brought her up and who was young during the war and the post-war years of austerity. She described her grandmother’s influence on her, stemming from the need to conserve things during wartime:

She is 90 – she will be 91 in May – and, so … She was in the ATS and the fire service; and erm, yes; so she drove ambulances during the war; and, erm, erm, yes and my grandpa fought in the war and went to France.

I just remember always, so my family saved quite a lot of energy, more out of a money thing I suppose than; so I was brought up by my grandma and my dad, and my gran always used Economy Seven so all is, put all the, erm, appliances on, like, as long as I can remember really, between four and seven in the morning; erm, because it is, erm; I mean, it – and that is an environmental thing as well as cheaper, isn’t it, because it is cheaper for them to, to generate electricity at that time because not very many people are produc–, are using energy then. So I always remember that right from when I was little … I just remember, erm, becoming quite obsessed about recycling as I got older and, and, you know, wherever I lived, always knowing what the recycling facilities were and things like that and I, I am quite, you know, and I do as much as I can, and erm, I try not to throw things away, and I try to reuse them and mend things and, you know, I have always; because I, I suppose I was brought up by my grandmother who kind of gives me that kind of war mentality about things.

She worked in the theatre, believed in man-made climate change, and was strongly committed to an environmental point of view:

At university I did have some science-y friends, and a lot of people who, you know, really cared about things to do with the planet, and – you know, from that kind of activist kind of standpoint I suppose – and erm, and, and a friend of mine decided to cycle round the world. And one of the aims of their trip – as well as enjoying, you know, seeing lots of countries – was to prove that you can travel without polluting. And that, really to, kind of, erm, visit places that – for them to see the benefit, the benefits of bikes as well, because they also raised some money and, there is an opportunity to give bicycles to, erm, people in countries, in developing countries who, yes, would maybe normally use public transport and, yeah, get people thinking that cycling is a, is a viable outcome … So I became very aware of environmental issues.

Rosemary was brought up in the country with dogs and horses and the freedom to roam. Her environmentalism stemmed from her upbringing in the country and her identification with her mother’s political activism:

I feel like I had a very happy childhood; erm, my mum in particular, erm, was passionate about all things outdoors; she was a fanatical fisherwoman, erm. We grew up with loads of dogs around, and ponies when we were little, and we used to live in Surrey, but erm, go up to Scotland, erm, for summer holidays and to Wales to her family home at Easter or Christmas. So a lot of the time, way away from, erm, the South East. And, erm, so I grew up as a
tomboy, outside, birdwatching, mapping out where all the nests were, on the ponies, going off exploring, just with, a lot of the time with animals, and if not, sort of, riding and exploring nature – and being yelled at by mum [she laughs] along with my kids, my siblings, to, you know, clean the [unclear], clean the stables, or whatever: we had to look after our animals as well. So, it was a very, it was a wonderful experience, really wonderful, I feel very blessed about that.

Mum was very active politically. If I have had any political training, it was through her because her family was strongly, had strong Liberal roots. So although we were in the heart of Thatcher land in, erm, Surrey, erm, she was still active as a Liberal campaigning at election times, and as soon as we were able – and if we wanted to – we were out there canvassing as well, which was an amazing experience: you know, knocking on people’s doors and asking what they thought about things. Erm, and so, erm, you know, I, I, kind of – I was aware of party politics but not NGO politics.

Perhaps also she plunged into environmental activism to avoid the pain of her brother’s death and her parents’ divorce, as illustrated in Chapter 6. Her feeling for nature was connected with her own particular countryside, not nature generally:

I want to get back to my nature and, you know, I guess it, it, it throws out something which I have never thought about before, that, actually, you know – we know that birds have migration patterns and salmon want to go back to the same river, but actually, as humans [unclear] you can still be a nature person without feeling you have to relate to all kinds of nature, right? It is actually that you have got, you have got more of a connectivity with certain kinds of landscape or ecology or whatever … and I hadn’t, hadn’t appreciated that, it is an important thing to recognise.

Arthur was brought up in a small West Midlands town on the edge of the country. His mother involved him in her interest in the natural world and took him for walks with their dog every day:

I did always have an interest in, in wildlife, nature, erm, which I probably attribute to the fact that my mum was very good at, you know, we always went walking the dog, for example – every day, erm, rain or shine, erm, over fields, so naturally I had a connection with the countryside. Erm. Sorry, I forgot to mention that I grew up in Worcestershire, which is a fairly rural county, really, erm, and so, yes, lots of long walks with my family, walking the dog, and she was always interested in wildlife, she worked for the RSPB for a while, erm, as a secretary, but through that we met a chap who also lived near us, who was, erm, an ornithologist. He would take us out a lot and we would, you know, go birdwatching and go on long sort of walks; he is still alive actually, he is a fascinating guy, he, he’d, you know, walk along and sort of, pull a, pull a bush away and you would see a few adders, and you know, he was that kind of guy, he just knew, he just knew what you were going to find, so it was always interesting. It was semi-rural: grew up, erm, on an estate that was kind of on the edge of the country, surrounded by green belt, so … in five minutes, well, you know, two minutes you would be in a field, and that does make a big difference I think to the way you appreciate, erm, wildlife.

A reason why I am interested in climate change so much is because that, or the way that impacts on the wildlife that I have grown up around; erm, and that’s probably where it stems from, and that has become a lot wider, in its , erm, in its scope, my interest has, you know, because, I have learned that it is not just kind of the birds and nature on my doorstep that is
being affected; it is other creatures, but also people, erm, you know – whether they are people in the Sahara, erm, or people in the Pacific islands that are gradually losing their, erm, habitat to rising sea levels – so, kind of, in brief, why I am interested in what I’m interested in.

He believed that growing up in the countryside gave him a more personal attachment to the natural world, which could apply to other people too:

I don’t imagine that I would have the same views necessarily if I grew up in a back garden, you know, without the garden, without access to the countryside as easily as I did. I live in Southeast London, in Peckham, and although it has got some nice parts, it does make – it is not countryside – it does make me think that maybe my relationship with the countryside would be different had I not experienced it and created memories there when I was younger.

Clive was brought up in the suburbs. His parents separated when he was quite young, so he spent weekdays with his father in a London suburb and weekends with his mother in the country:

My parents divorced when I was quite young, so I had, kind of, two sets of parents effectively – I spent different amounts of time dependent on how old I was, so; until I was, sort of, about 7 or 8, I was living with my mother, and my father after that, I had an older sister and a younger half-sister … So, with Mum during the week and then Dad at weekends and then it swapped over so it would be Dad during the week and Mum at weekends … It worked well in some ways, and, you know, caused certain difficulties as well in terms of, you know, feeling grounded in one place, I suppose; and my mum went to live in Devon when I was about 7, and so we saw less of her, and, you know, that was a different environment again to be in when we did go down to Devon; it was quite different from being in the sort of London area where I spent most of my sort of teenage years.

His mother was a committed activist with left-wing causes including climate change, and her influence shaped his environmental interest. He was committed to a belief in, and concern about, man-made climate change, but was not actively involved. Possibly his parents’ separation undermined his confidence as regards activism, but he might also have been reacting against his mother’s activism:

I think maybe because she was, erm, quite politically involved and campaigning generally in, sort of, left-wing circles, that the things kind of interrelated … so you would be involved in different causes … And I think the same to me really because I have grown up and, you know, considered politically where I am and I think I am quite sort of left-wing so, I hear a lot about that conversation about – looking after people in the world, and the world in general, and big concern for others and the environment is all part of the package, like I am saying.

One particular place we lived we had a very big garden, we had a family of foxes living at the bottom … in Surrey actually, yeah. And we had a security light came on, and my bedroom was at the back of the house so I would see it come on. I remember one night looking out and seeing two badgers walking across the garden, and I just caught that because the light had come on, and it was such a magical thing to see … Things like building homes for hedgehogs in the garden and those things childr—; birdwatching as well, remembering different things now, yeah, having the books, and the spotting books to spot birds and butterflies … in a dilettante-ish sort of way for one year, did the project at school and stuff, yeah, quite into it.
Parental influence, links to an older generation

Holly, Pamela, Victor and Brian had all known an older generation who preserved things and avoided waste from old-fashioned values of not wasting material things, more to do with sustainability and self-sufficiency than environmentalism. In these statements there is an egalitarian quality in cultural theory terms. All four can be seen as integrating to some extent an ecology of mind, society and the natural world. I have described Pamela’s experience in the previous section.

Holly explained her interest in recycling and conservation in terms of her parents’ influence on her, illustrated in Chapter 5.

Victor showed the link between present-day environmentalism and climate change concern, and the self-sufficiency and sustainability of his grandparents’ and his wife’s parents’ generations. This is illustrated in Chapter 7.

It is just a different world, and they must have had a slower, more, you know – the slowing down is a psychological thing as well, isn’t it? You know, enjoying, time, you know, we all manage to do it when we go on holiday, but we don’t seem to be able to do it when we are not on holiday – it all speeds up again. Insane sort of, you know.

Thinking of [his wife’s] parents now, they, they, they still, they grow stuff; they are quite interesting. They have an allotment, they have a huge garden in Essex, erm, they grow their own wine and drink lots of it [laughs], and they grow a lot of their own food; they are not necessarily, it is not an environmental thing so much, they are not environmentalists, but they are definitely convinced that the system is ludicrous; erm; you know, that the whole growth thing – I know that from many drunken conversations with her dad. He is a retired art teacher … you know, that this is all bonkers, and why are we all spending money on rubbish all the time? You know, he barely spends a penny on anything, he will proudly tell you, he thinks it’s great, it is a subversive sort of, it is hard enough getting involved in this, I am not doing it, it is rubbish. And he says things like, you know, ‘I do it because I am so tight’, but actually he is very generous really, but I think, it is his, it is his own little one-man; and her mum is the same. They are fantastic, you know, they will not … They are rebelling; they are not up for it.

Brian, brought up in a Midlands country village, was close to his parents though he sometimes disagreed with them politically. He believed that his parents’ conservationist approach and his own environmentalism were linked:

We were, we were not a poor family; we were certainly not a wealthy family. And so, you know, my parents didn’t accumulate goods. And my father just recently died, and so I happened to be dealing with the house. And there’s not a massive accumulation of stuff; they weren’t; and they were menders of stuff. They would mend clothes, and they would get things mended rather than replace them. So that comes from those, always been that underlying, make good, make do and mend.
Good parental relationship, country upbringing, relatively environmental interests

Holly, Gloria, Louis and Nora grew up in the country or in a suburban area close to the countryside. They had apparently satisfactory but not environmental families of origin, and were relatively committed to environmental and climate change concerns. They all expressed quite egalitarian positions in cultural theory terms, but there was no sense of an integration between ecologies of mind, society and nature.

Holly was brought up outside Geneva in a strongly international setting. Her parents were young in the war and post-war years and careful about waste. As illustrated in Chapter 5, she was passionately committed to recycling, loved the countryside and the outdoors, but travelled by air a lot because she could afford to, despite knowing it was environmentally damaging.

Gloria was brought up in the Home Counties, the only child of a Bangladeshi father and Filipino mother. She had been committed to environmental concern and worked for a voluntary agency. Her opposition to being a ‘suit’ might have been a rebellion, and her interest in entering business consultancy, a return to work more aligned to her parents’ wishes. She was deeply affected by the 2004 tsunami in Asia and the consequent suffering of survivors, which might have stemmed from a connection with her South Asian and South East Asian origins. Her environmental interest was secondary to her concern for social justice, and while volunteering in Bangladesh she was more struck by the corrupt political environment than its acute environmental problems, but she did take environmental issues very seriously:

\textit{Going back to the tsunami, that was a rather key turning point, was it?}
\textit{I think it was; just seeing all that suffering, I guess; it was pretty awful.}
\textit{Through the media?}
Through the media, yeah, yeah, erm, actually because I don’t think I’d seen anything like that before, I guess, just the sort of sheer scale of, of, death, I guess and destruction, erm, and also seeing the public, erm, sort of respond to that; you know, people being really generous giving to the DEC, giving lots of useless stuff to charity shops, you know; but basically doing what they could so, that sort of got me interested in, in the charity sector.

Louis was brought up in the country, but I could not identify any link between his rural childhood environment and his environmentalism, which he associated with school and university rather than his farming background. He found it hard to pinpoint the origin of his interest in environmental issues:

I grew up in the, in the sort of, I grew up in a village, a small village, and part of my family are farmers, and so it is like they are quite connected with the, sort of … yeah; that sort of environment; erm; and, erm, I didn’t spend a lot of time when I was younger exploring my
local area, you know, just, you know, you do as a kid, sort of walking around, and riding your bike around.

You're saying that your mother anyway, your mother’s family were farmers, were they? And that sort of that kept you, that gave you a sense of the, the animal world, and the, you know, what’s the word, the plant world?

Probably, yeah; maybe in a sense, I would say, erm … Yeah, yeah. Exactly. I don’t, I don’t feel like that was the reason necessarily, but it is difficult to know what the reason is for it; it probably contributed to it somewhat; I think there is also just an enjoyment, of, erm, sort of, being.

Nora was partly brought up in the country. She had an apparently good relationship with her mother, and had a step-father, which suggested that her parents separated in her early life. She was environmentally concerned, but knew nothing about climate change, and found it difficult to pinpoint whence her recycling concerns originated:

I have been thinking a bit about it, and I thought, ‘Oh, what will I say?’ … Well, the first thing I thought of, was, petrol … I suppose petrol must have some effect, you know, in cars and exhaust fumes, and all of that.

What do you think is the issue about petrol?

Well, [sighs] – I don’t know. I suppose I thought, when I knew I was coming, I thought, ‘Why did I say I would go and talk about that? I don’t know anything about it!’

You are feeling pressure from somewhere about you – what you ought, what you ought to do? Yes, I suppose so. I haven’t thought about it … I don’t know where it comes from, where does it come from? [Five-second silence.] Maybe it is advertising as well, I don’t know. Maybe it is like the moral thing that you should be looking after the planet; and; who says you should be? I know; erm; people on the radio; I suppose, the government. [Six-second silence.]

Funny isn’t it?

She described how the local small park was a sanctuary where she felt grounded. She could not imagine living in the country at this time:

I haven’t had a garden for years, so the garden is a very good place to go – it does make you feel in touch with, the ground I suppose, yeah. And space; it is not huge, but it was amazing to where it is because as soon as you get out you have got very busy, erm, you have got [a busy inner London area], and then you have got the High Street, and then you walk in there, and even though you are surrounded by high-rise buildings and, you can hear Sainsbury’s sometimes, the lorries unloading – it does feel, especially in the summer when the leaves are on the trees, it does feel like you have just walked into a different, it is like a different planet, really. Which I think is really important, and it is instantly calming; it is quite frantic on the streets and a fast pace, you go in there and you can just relax and, yes so, I think that is important.

Good parental relationship, urban upbringing, non-environmental interests

Francis, Benjamin and Simon had good relationships with their parents, but no childhood exposure to rural life, and little interest in the environment. Francis and Benjamin had some entrepreneurial instincts, although Francis was an academic, and they both worked in and seemed attuned to
hierarchies, so in cultural theory terms they could be seen as a combination of individualist and hierarchist. Perhaps they were unlikely to develop environmental interests without the sort of experiences that Birkeland (2005) and Bodnar (2008) described. There was no sense with them of any relationship between ecologies of mind, society and nature.

Francis was brought up in a university town. He revered but may also have been in rivalry with his scientist father, but was close to his mother. He was aware of but apparently unconcerned about the environment and man-made climate change:

personally, I suppose, am rather sympathetic to, er, kind of greenish arguments but in a faintly hypocritical way. So, for example, I have never really driven and didn’t pass any kind of driving test until I was 43; and obviously, this is partly just due to incompetence and so on on my own part, which is then sometimes justified in other terms; erm; I am, erm. But I have, for example, at times in my life flown a great deal – which I understand to be more environmentally damaging than driving a car, erm. And, erm, the thing that I feel probably ought to have changed my attitude – I can’t say has had a huge effect on my attitude – is erm, my children.

I’ve got great, kind of, intellectual respect for my father, er, and I think he is a good scientist, er, and, er, I am also aware that obviously in certain ways I have reacted against my father – for example not driving a car, my father is a very keen driver.

Oh, I see.

He very fondly liked the idea of me driving, and went, he came to visit me in Houston – he was really rather touched by being driven by me, which was obviously something which he had waited for all his life. But, er, obviously my desire not to be a driver was partly just because I wanted to be different from him.

Benjamin was brought up in an inner-city environment. His father was brought up in rural West Africa and struggled to get educated given his own father’s opposition. As illustrated in Chapter 6, Benjamin had no interest in the natural world, perhaps because of his inner-city upbringing:

Yeah; [inner-city London] was an environment I was comfortable in; so, that was a, apart from anything else, if you kind of looked to our shared experiences, say, like the odd school trip, a lot of them would be firmly within, quite an urban context. So, yeah, no, I would probably see … that talking about the environment often, can often feel like a, quite a nebulous concept to me.

His parents’ origins may have influenced Benjamin’s interest in giving poor people in the developing world greater self-determination through making renewable energy available to them. This was more significant than environmental issues, which concerned him only peripherally, as illustrated in Chapter 6.
He was sceptical about climate change mitigation and uninterested in the environment, except when it affected the lives of people in developing countries. As illustrated in Chapter 6, he thought that climate change might have progressed too far to justify actions that affect people today adversely.

I’m not sure I have the most neatly formed ideas around climate change, but, they probably separate into those two arenas that you have, the one very like, kind of, local issues that are just about types of energy that people are using, which isn’t so much about wide-scale effects of climate change; I mean, if you are in a marginalised community who might be affected by, erm, say, erm, more unpredictable rainfall or something like that, but you are also affected by like, kind of, low-quality access to, energy, so you are off grid, so you have to use quite dirty forms of fuel or – many of the households that we would work with, they would, they would, erm, be using kerosene lamps, but they would also be using, in some cases, erm, charcoal for [unclear]. So my interest was, in part, more about the quality of energy that you can access, and how, how clean what you can get is; so I thought, saw, that as much of a concern as, erm, the kind of broader issues around how much, how much energy or pollution is being produced by the rest of the world.

Simon was an only child whose father died when he was an infant. He was born and brought up in east London and had a close, supportive relationship with his mother, who encouraged and supported his interest in the theatre in order to build his confidence. He was threatened by and avoided the country, and returned to an urban environment as quickly as possible. As illustrated in Chapter 7, he was a climate change sceptic and believed that global warming was the result of a natural cycle.

There is always a [unclear], there is always a connection to the internet, so wherever you are you can connect to the internet; whereas in the countryside there is not even a phone signal on your phone or, you can’t make a basic call on your mobile, and it is very isolating.

In London you are, you are never alone, you can feel lonely – incredibly lonely – but you are never actually alone, whereas in the countryside it is just you. You are left with your thoughts.

A problematic parental relationship, environmental interests

Mary was brought up on an American Midwestern farm and had an environmental approach. She mentioned her father critically several times but not her mother. She had reacted against her father’s industrialised farming, had felt isolated and unhappy as a child and left home as soon as she could. She had had no lasting intimate relationships. She did see connections between the ecologies of society and of nature:

My father was part of the generation that were seduced by the Industrial Revolution, and he started out, erm, with a small dairy farm, and the larger farms got, and the more he had to do with just one son and a daughter who was – not me, the other, the other daughter, who was quite willing to help, but not quite as strong obviously – erm, he started purchasing bigger and bigger machinery, and he started managing his crops with a lot of chemicals; it was a lot more work with these large machines to drive around trees so he knocked down all the trees, flattened the land as much as he could.
I know that we have an effect on the earth, I saw that from my father. And, and; when you watch; erm, when you watch what chemicals do to insects – even fertilisers and things – my father was using materials, he was just fertilising, just to make the crops grow faster, but you couldn’t touch it with your hands, it would burn them. Oh, how is it possible to put that into the earth and into animals without it affecting? It would just have to.

She described massive climate changes – in temperatures and precipitation of snow in her home area:

From my own experience when I was a little girl on the farm in [a Midwest state], we lived quite rurally; we didn’t have [unclear] tractors and machinery, so that could be polluting some of my memories, but I remember, it started to snow in October and November, and we had snow well over my head, and if I was verbal, that would be quite high. Whereas now, it does not snow until after Christmas in [the Midwest state].

A problematic parental relationship, no environmental interest

Trevor grew up in a spectacular region of Spain, was evidently intelligent, and egalitarian in cultural theory terms. He described the small southern Spanish town where he grew up as a ‘shit-hole’, and felt little connection with the surrounding countryside. He saw human rights as more important than the environment, he was sceptical about climate science, and he emphasised his moderation, all of which had led him to reject environmental activism and to see the natural world as separate and unimportant. It is not clear why he was effectively non-environmental, but perhaps traumas in his family, unconsciously transmitted to him, prevented an environmental concern. His great-grandfather was killed and his grandfather traumatised during the Spanish Civil War; his parents and sister had been affected by these traumas, and by his mother’s father’s suicide, his mother’s consequent alcoholism and his father’s severe stroke during his childhood. As illustrated in Chapter 6, he thought there was no agreement about the causes of climate change, and emphasised his moderation:

I grew up in a, it is a small town but it is a very urban environment; well, obviously there is landscape and lot of olive trees; erm, and I have gone to the mountain nearby but I, I was never doing, I don’t know, trekking or … It didn’t have a sense of being connected with that environment outside the town … I have never had a, erm, connection maybe with, erm, nature, yeah; I never had, for instance when, erm, my parents had a dog when my sister was, was a child, erm – the dog died before I was born; erm I never had pets, so I, I, I was not; maybe I was more into human feelings and relationships, yeah, rather than nature.

So his family was taken by, erm, Republicans because they had money, erm; his father was killed, and as he was coming back from Granada he was in the area, erm, controlled by the … He had the Socialist card, they found out and they put him in jail … He used to have nightmares and you could, when I was going to, erm, my grandfather’s place, I could listen to him overnight like, shouting, erm, moaning.

My father, when he was 40 – yeah, 39, 40 – had a brain stroke, and he was about to die.

My father’s mother [his mother’s father] committed suicide [laughs] … What happened to my father is nature; what happened to my grandfather, my mum’s dad, is not nature but is something that is not linked with the situation.
Because my mother was seeing all the, all these complications and, erm, and the situation at home, she started drinking and, and she, erm, she was; well, after many years that we discussed this, I think alcoholism, you never, you will never be non-alcoholic, you are alcoholic all your life, it is the way you deal with the, problem that arise. So she is fine now, she doesn’t drink.

There are reasons to be concerned about, erm, climate change; erm … researchers are influenced by the, erm, let’s say the media or the academic papers they work for, to, erm, investigate and to come up with certain results that are either against or pro climate change or, or do more advocacy or not regarding the problems, erm, relating to climate change …

**Mind, society and the natural world**

Four participants, including Holly, Victor and Rosemary, felt aware, implicitly, of links between the worlds of the mind, society and the natural world. Another four expressed a partial connection between them; three others showed some sense of an awareness of the environment; Benjamin and Trevor are examples of the remainder who manifested very little awareness of the natural world and its connectedness with their internal and social worlds.

Holly loved an outdoors life and contact with the natural world in the country and by the sea. She was affected by damage to the natural world, but only by her own direct experience of it. As a surfer, Victor had had direct experience of the environment, particularly weather, and how climate change affects surfing. He enjoyed the simplicity of camping and the outdoors life, and the risks of surfing. These things highlighted for him how consumerist our society is, and suggested how we could slow down, focus on essentials, and be in touch with the natural world. He was impressed by friends who consume less, but he did not want to give up flying.

Rosemary described an idyllic childhood in a particular natural environment. She was brought up with horses and other animals and was free to roam. Her physically and politically active mother encouraged her interest in the outdoors and in politics, which led her on to environmental studies, to her involvement in environmental politics and eventually to her developing an ecological investment fund. She recognised that her enjoyment of nature was based on her attachment to the countryside where she grew up.

By contrast, Benjamin was brought up in the inner city. His parents were West African, but he had little sense of affiliation to West Africa, and felt no connection to the natural world, either in this country or in Africa. The concept of the environment was nebulous to him, and he associated the concept of the environment with urban parkland.
Likewise, Trevor grew up in a small town in Andalusia, which he disliked, and he had no relation to the surrounding countryside and environment. Simon grew up in the inner city and was threatened by exposure to the natural world in the country.

Conclusions

In spite of the limitations of my sample, some suggestive patterns emerge, in which an upbringing in the countryside is associated with environmentalism – stronger where there has been a strong guiding relationship with a parent or parent figure, or an awareness of an older generation with a strong engagement with the natural world. Even where childhood experiences have been difficult, a rural upbringing seemed to be associated with environmentalism. An urban upbringing could be associated with a lack of interest in the environment, with or without a strong parental relationship in childhood. Generally, when a participant had had a close relationship with his or her mother or parental figure, this had shaped their subsequent life and interests, whether or not towards environmentalism.

People with environmental interests can broadly be seen as leaning towards egalitarianism in cultural theory terms, and there was often an implicit sense of a relationship between the ecologies of mind, society and nature. These seem absent in participants without experience of the natural world even when they too are egalitarian in cultural theory terms.
Chapter 9: Analysis of Findings

Outline of my findings

This chapter reviews my findings in the light of the theoretical issues considered in Chapters 2 and 3, where I explored psychological and sociological theories of denial. Of twenty well-intentioned, mostly middle-class participants, four were overt climate change sceptics, and two did not know that fossil fuels cause climate change. Participants disavowed knowledge of climate change science, disregarded their anti-environmental behaviour and blamed the media for lack of leadership; a few anticipated environmental catastrophes. A few participants could link mind, society and the natural world, but most did not. Those who felt empowered were optimistic and accepted scientific opinion, but many felt helpless, despairing and disempowered. There were strong associations between some participants’ environmental commitment, their mothers’ positive example and encouragement and the participants’ attachment to their childhood rural environments. All participants manifested complex, contradictory feelings about climate change, most were disturbed by environmental activism, and both well-off and poorer participants attributed non-environmental behaviour to wealth and poverty respectively. The rest of the chapter goes into greater detail about these findings.

Denial: negation and disavowal

This section is concerned with the concept of denial. My analysis of denial is based on Freud’s distinction between disavowel, ‘Verleugnung’ (S. Freud 1938), when opposite beliefs are held simultaneously, and negation, ‘Verneinung’ (S. Freud 1925a), when something is known but treated as unimportant. My analysis of the data supported the distinction between the two. Weintrobe (2013: 38–40) argues that disavowal is a more stable and entrenched form of denial than negation. In the light of single interviews it is not possible to determine whether this conclusion is supported. I review some criticisms of the concept of denial in Chapter 10.

A number of environmentally aware participants, like Holly, negated their awareness of climate change, disregarding their own anti-environmental behaviour. In particular, they found it hard to resist the attractions and freedom of flying, and knowingly acted in an anti-environmental way.
Participants disavowed their knowledge of climate change by resisting awareness of the science of climate change, putting unwelcome facts to the back of their minds and acting as if they did not exist, and adopting trains of thought that treated the facts of climate change as irrelevant – or, feeling overwhelmed and uncomprehending about the environment and climate change, detaching themselves from the facts and disclaiming any responsibility.

Participants’ disavowal of climate change was also reflected in their views about the role of media. Some had observed reduced media coverage of climate change in recent years, which had led to a loss of momentum of concern about climate change, including in themselves. One saw the media as minimising the reality of climate change. An environmental journalist perhaps defensively described the pressures the media faced in not moving too far from the values of their target audience. One participant considered that the media exaggerated the threat in order to inspire guilt, a clear disavowal of his own anxieties.

It is sobering that out of a sample of twenty educated and largely middle-class, public-spirited and well-intentioned participants, four were overt climate change sceptics, and two were ignorant of the part played by fossil fuels in increasing greenhouse gases and causing climate change. The remaining fourteen participants accepted the findings of climate change science. Even in this sample, many participants could detach themselves from the implications of climate change, instances of disavowal or implicatory denial.

One participant saw how technology can tend to cut people, especially young people, off from one another. His father had always been interested in how things work, but his own generation had been brought up to accept technology without understanding how it works. His concerns were borne out by a younger participant, one of whose reasons for disliking the countryside was that he felt cut off there without a signal on his mobile phone. This all reflected Searles’ (1972) view that technology cuts us off from an experience of the environment and gives us a false and omnipotent sense of control over nature.

Disavowal would include what Searles (1972) and Segal (1987) described as individual psychological denial of the environmental crisis and the nuclear threat. They saw this as operating through splitting and projection, aspects of the paranoid–schizoid position described by Klein (1946). Randall (2005), Joffe (1996), Wasdell (2011), and Weintrobe (2013) identified splitting and projection taking place at a social level as responses to climate change. Cultural theory identifies an individualistic position, similar to Schwartz’s self-enhancement (see Chapter 3), where concerns for self-advancement over-ride concerns for others and the environment, and an egalitarian position, in which concerns for others
and for the environment are prominent. Individualism could be seen as to do with splitting and the paranoid–schizoid position, egalitarianism as integrative, closer to a depressive position.

Splitting and projection operated in participants’ disturbing feelings provoked by environmental activists. They tended to identify them as extremists, crazy, imposing their beliefs on other people or being judgmental. One participant saw environmentalists as hating the human race and wanting to see it punished; another saw environmental direct action as terrorist, and another saw participating in a pressure group as undermining the capacity to think clearly.

Almost everybody had difficulty in thinking about the consequences of continuing climate change beyond the consequences for grandchildren. Conceiving the implications for our grandchildren’s children was almost unimaginable, hardest for those without children.

Many participants disavowed the evidence of the dangers of continued greenhouse gas emissions and consequent climate change, and picked up news items that contradicted the established science in small ways, disagreed with the scientific findings, represented the situation as an equally balanced debate between two valid but opposed views, or could not or preferred not to understand the science. These are all arguably evidence of a split between how things are and how they wished they were, a split between the reality and the pleasure principles.

Some participants, as in Peter Cook’s sketch about a millennial group (Cook ed. 2003), were fascinated with catastrophic scenarios – like possible extremely destructive climate events – thus splitting off the knowledge that immediate catastrophic climate change events are less likely than gradual, inexorable change. Cohn’s (1970) sociological account argued that overcrowding and rapid social change promoted millenarianism in the Middle Ages, and Catton’s (1982) ecological narrative maintained that humanity has over-reached the environment’s carrying capacity. Two participants who were preoccupied with catastrophes had suffered traumatic personal losses, which may have influenced them unconsciously.

Two participants split off climate concern from other issues of social justice: one committed to human rights, and the other to promoting greater self-determination for people on low incomes in developing countries. Both negated climate change threats by treating them as less important than their philanthropic concerns.

All my participants manifested a wide range of forms of denial, conscious and unconscious. Norgaard (2011) described ‘environmental privilege’, whereby taken-for-granted structures and practices give
disproportionate access to resources, and Weintrobe (2013) identified a similar phenomenon whereby our culture appeals to parts of us that feel arrogantly entitled to exploit others and apply omnipotent fixes to life’s problems. Group and individual forms of denial are closely related. The form of denial that each participant adopted was sometimes connected to their family of origin and their present familial, social and professional position. Trevor’s interest in human rights stemmed from his family’s experiences in the Spanish Civil War. Francis’s ambivalence about climate change probably stemmed from his father’s climate scepticism and his wife’s role in a fossil fuel corporation, and Benjamin’s urban background – and his father’s struggle to emerge from rural limitations and possible poverty and acquire an education – may have shaped his disinterest in the environment.

Four participants manifested a mainly unconscious sense of an association between the worlds of the mind, society and the natural world; others expressed some sense of a partial connection between them, or an awareness of the environment. The remainder seemed largely unaware of the natural world and how it connected with their internal and social worlds. One participant could only be affected by direct experience of damage to the natural world. Another experienced how climate change affected surfing, and enjoyed camping and the outdoors life. A third, brought up with horses and free to roam the countryside, encouraged by her mother, became interested in the outdoors and politics, which led to her work in green investment. By contrast, one, who was brought up in the inner city, felt little connection with his parents’ West Africa or the natural world and found the concept of the environment nebulous; another, raised in the inner city, found the natural world threatening. A third, from a small Andalusian town, grew up with no relation to its surrounding countryside and environment.

**Psychological and sociological theory**

This section concerns the overlap in the interview data between psychological theory described in Chapter 2 and sociological theory in Chapter 3. The dynamic of psychoanalysis is similar to the dynamics of affiliation to differing cultural and interpretive communities. Psychoanalytic and sociological forms of denial overlap. A psychoanalytic approach concerns the inner dynamic of different parts of the personality, based on internal object relations; a sociological approach describes demands for compliance with social norms, but arguably the demand to conform is based on inner psychological pressures from internal objects that sociology takes no account of.

In the vignette in Chapter 2 from the ‘Dora’ case, Dora said that she knew Freud would interpret her referring to her mother’s jewel case as associated with the female genitals. Freud interpreted this as an example of something disregarded emerging from the unconscious, but it could just as well be seen as her anticipating a social interaction between them, perhaps referring to what she may have seen as
Freud’s preoccupation with sex. The overlap between the two approaches has become clearer to me as my work has gone on. The most obvious example of the operation of this is the many references among my participants to not wanting to be identified as extremists, and to distancing themselves from extremists. These can be interpreted as emerging either from an internal struggle with a strict superego, or from a social pressure not to raise socially unacceptable problems.

Psychological mechanisms such as negation can operate at a cultural as well as individual level, as the individual is psychologically influenced by family and social forces. Negation implies that a fact is accepted, but its emotional and psychological implications are denied, which corresponds closely to what Cohen (2001) describes as ‘implicatory denial’. Likewise, Cohen emphasises the bystander role in abusive situations, and Zerubavel (2006) brings out how silence is co-constructed between an actor and an audience. Similarly, catastrophism can be seen as both a psychological and sociological phenomenon. In each case a phenomenon may be construed either as an individual psychological mechanism for reducing anxiety, or as the consequence of group norms and pressures, which might of course themselves be prompted by anxiety. Practically speaking, psychoanalytic and sociological explanations often have much in common.

A number of writers have applied psychoanalytic thinking to social structures and organisation. Hoggett (2010) saw climate change denial as part of a perverse social structure, where part of the mind is perverted in order to escape loss. Weintrobe (2009) saw denial as embedded within cultures, and identified groups as enabling diminished responsibility by holding a collectivised anxiety about arrogance, greed and guilt. Wasdell (2011) saw a societal state of mind, particularly under high stress, diminishing resources and rapid change, leading to paranoid–schizoid reinforcement of social defences against anxiety.

Others have explained social and cultural forms of denial in sociological terms. Cohen (2001) identified ‘accounts’ – that is, culturally transmitted and acceptable explanations of actions, which he saw as distinct from psychoanalytic explanations of disavowal. Norgaard (2011) attributed pressures to conform to the social norms preventing discussion of climate change to ‘double realities’ – knowing and not knowing – achieved through the social organisation of denial. Zerubavel (2006) saw everyday denial as based in how children learn culturally from adults what to ignore as ‘irrelevant’, or, from a psychoanalytic perspective, how children learn to internalise adult prohibitions and inhibitions. Thus Trevor learned early in life to ignore his mother’s alcoholism until it became inescapable, and Brian described avoiding certain topics with his father.
A number of writers including Lorenzoni, Nicholson-Cole and Whitmarsh (2007) identified interpretive communities which called on their participants to conform to social norms and expectations – socially acceptable ways of behaving, requiring carbon-dependent lifestyles. Theories of social dominance, identity-protective cognition and motivated reasoning provide social psychological backing for the operation of group processes in avoiding anxiety and guilt. Only three, environmentally interested, participants overtly acknowledged the influence of their friends, relations and associates, but others may have implicitly been influenced. Others disregarded pressures to conform to social norms from their social networks. Some felt in conflict with their and their peers’ values, or separate from their social worlds; one had been influenced in an anti-environmental direction by her peer group, another felt that he should be more out of step with his friends than he was. A number suspected that environmentalism may be confined to a particular environmentally aware middle-class circle.

Interpretive communities were perhaps implicitly influencing almost all my participants to avoid being identified as environmental extremists, and many distanced themselves from people that they perceived in that light, disparaging environmental activist friends or relations as misanthropic, fundamentalist, judgmental, crazy, or as hysterics. One, a supermarket worker, campaigned informally over the use of supermarket plastic bags, and one was militant about cycling and how car drivers treat cyclists, but another had had a crisis of confidence over her previously assured campaigning position. Most were reluctant to involve themselves in activism. The only unequivocal campaigner was the City worker who strove to support climate change scepticism.

Several did not want to be thought of as preaching to their friends – supporting theories of social pressures to suppress unacceptable pro-environmental opinions (Norgaard 2011; Lorenzoni 2007) and to observe the unspoken rule of silence, not to discuss climate change. These examples highlight the relational aspect of this form of denial. Zerubavel (2006) identified cultural denial, where a denying actor and a silent respondent collaborate. Silence breakers are ostracised or otherwise sanctioned, as was Thomas Stockman in Ibsen’s An Enemy of the People (Ibsen 1964) for publicising environmental pollution, against the commercial interests of the townspeople. Zerubavel’s cultural denial is similar to Cohen’s (2001) description of the silent collusive bystander. The limited extent of overt references to interpretive communities might disguise their implicit influence in relation to environmental activism. However, it may have been to do with my conduct of the interviews – or perhaps participants were reluctant to admit the influence of interpretive communities.

Some struggled with internal contradictions within themselves. Pro-environmental participants often found it difficult to give up flying. Two aspired to live a partly environmentally-friendly life, while
three guardedly admired environmentally committed friends. An environmental journalist described how he had to fly in connection with his work; his friends flew to take part in ‘environmental’ holidays. Another participant saw herself as hypocritical for flying for weekend breaks abroad. These conflicts illustrate how air travel is felt to be an unquestioned, integral part of a Western way of life. They can be interpreted either as psychological negation or as sociological influence from conflicting interpretive communities.

Thus interpretive communities do exist in participants’ social and internal worlds, often in a hidden way, as when the participant feels at odds with his or her interpretive community. Perhaps too in some cases participants represented themselves as more independent and autonomous than they may in fact have been. People’s acceptance, denial or resistance to an interpretive community can all be seen as that interpretive community having an impact. The pressures from interpretive communities could also be interpreted psychoanalytically, with those distancing themselves from environmentalists being seen as involved in paranoid–schizoid splitting, those trying to deal with internal contradictions as in a more depressive position. There is therefore a valid argument to be made that, in many cases, psychoanalytic and sociological analyses are either similar or complementary accounts of findings.

Impact of early life history

This section outlines how feeling empowered about taking action over climate change was an important factor governing participants’ responses to climate change mitigation. Those who felt confident seemed to come from secure family and parental relationships which had enabled them to establish themselves securely in the social world. This suggests that a sense of agency is primarily psychological in origin, but carries over into the social world. However, since I did not include a class analysis, I cannot say how far class origins affected their sense of agency. Those who believed that an individual can make a difference tended to accept the scientific opinion, felt empowered to act over climate change and had a generally optimistic outlook, though there were hints that their optimism may have had undercurrents of doubt, anxiety and loss. One previously very active participant had had a crisis which made her question what she had achieved.

Other participants felt helpless, impotent and despairing about climate change, or questioned the possibility of taking effective action under a political system governed by short-term election cycles. There seemed parallels here with the findings of Alloy et al. (1984), described in Chapter 2 in the section entitled ‘Learned helplessness’ (under 3. Psychological theories pertinent to climate change b. Behavioural explanations), that people who attribute negative outcomes to specific factors will show helplessness in comparable situations.
Some participants identified with parents – predominantly mothers or grandparents – so that the parent passed on important sets of values to the participant. The literature of parental influence mainly concerns values being transmitted verbally, but the parents of several participants communicated values more by example than through words. Arthur became aware of the natural world through his daily walks with his mother, and Rosemary’s mother was passionate about all things outdoors. She involved her in looking after horses and dogs and let her birdwatch and roam the countryside.

Parents also influenced participants adversely through their actions. Mary grew up on a farm in the Midwest of the United States, and had environmental interests, but she implied that she had had a difficult relationship with her father, and she had reacted against his use of chemicals and heavy machinery and his bulldozing the landscape to facilitate industrialised farming. Growing up on a West African farm, Benjamin’s father had been denied an education by Benjamin’s grandfather. Finally getting some education and coming to the UK, Benjamin’s father may have reacted against Benjamin’s grandfather’s attitude. This may have left Benjamin with little feeling for his parents’ environment in West Africa, or for the environment generally. Where a participant had been close to a parent, they could often identify that parent’s impact in shaping their thoughts and feelings, whether their parent had been environmental or not.

Some environmentally committed participants felt strongly attached to the particular rural environment where they grew up which had been particularly influential – sometimes reinforced by the influence of their mother, or mother figure, consistent with how the metaphor of the mother has been seen as representing the earth and the natural world (Randall 2005; Ryland 2000). It would also support the idea, as Heneghan (2013), Bodnar (2012) and Birkeland and Aasen (2012) describe, that such an experience may shape the future mental health and attitude to environmental matters. Even when things had been difficult in childhood, people brought up in the country were likely to be environmentally minded, while those raised in the city often seemed uninterested in the natural environment.

People with environmental interests could broadly be seen as leaning towards egalitarianism, suggesting that environmentalism might contain within it a sense of fairness, and there can be an implicit sense of a relationship between the ecologies of mind, society and nature, which seemed absent for those without experience of the natural world. Those who did not describe close relationships with parents found it hard to identify the source of their environmentalism.
Complexities and contradictions

Perhaps my most important finding is the universal tendency among all participants to have ambivalent and contradictory feelings about climate change and the environment. In Chapter 5 I compare two interviews. Francis’s sophisticated position on climate change illustrates the complexities of denial. He was the most overtly self-reflective of my participants, having thought a lot about climate change. His broadly sceptical position was based on the views of his sceptic scientist father and his wife’s position as a fossil fuel corporation executive, which his family finances depended on. He acknowledged the facts of climate change, but was morally neutral and unconcerned about those suffering its consequences. He argued that responsibility for the ill effects of burning fossil fuels lay with users, not their producers. He several times spoke of things that he ought to be, but was not, concerned about. Meanwhile he subscribed to what he called a convenient, pro-environmental, uncommitted ‘green’ position, costing nothing, consistent with his own self-avowedly hypocritical environmental views. This might have been an attempt to disguise his ambivalence about the environmental damage caused by his wife’s and his family’s flying. He presented a self-aware, thought through, complex and contradictory picture of his thoughts and feelings about climate change and the environment, but with underlying unresolved contradictions in it. His overall position can be seen as negation of climate change concern. Perhaps his surface moral, and apparently emotional, neutrality regarding climate change disguised an underlying disquiet.

Holly’s optimism seemed important to her sense of wellbeing. She reflected about her own position simply and spontaneously, and was more openly ambivalent than Francis about climate change and the environment. She was enthusiastic about walking, skiing and the outdoors life generally, passionate about recycling and critical of people that would not recycle, and concerned about the lack of contact that children in her school had with the environment. She had been influenced by her environmentalist sister-in-law and her husband, who bicycle everywhere and will not fly. Yet she acknowledged that she could have been more informed than she was, and saw her position as based on her and her family being well off and to some extent unconcerned about the environmental consequences of their actions, an example of negation. She acknowledged that flying a lot for holidays and heli-skiing were both environmentally harmful, and admitted that her enthusiasm for recycling and concern for the environment – and continuing to fly frequently – were contradictory, which is an example of disavowal.

Taken overall, Holly was openly ambivalent about her position, with elements of both disavowal and negation. Francis’s form of negation was superficially sophisticated and coherent, but he seemed defensive in repeating that he ought to feel differently than he did. The complexities of their
respective positions reflected how virtually all my participants displayed conscious or unconscious, complex and ambivalent feelings, and expressed degrees of uncertainty and ambivalence about climate change and the environment. This unites many parts of the findings from my interviews with my participants.

This complexity and ambivalence emerged strongly in some participants’ resistance to giving up flying despite being fully aware of its harmful environmental effects. As outlined above, many participants disparaged environmental activist friends or relations, and manifested the complexity of denial of climate change and its consequences in the great variety of interrelated forms that their denial assumed. Thus both well-off and poorer participants could explain their and other people’s non-environmental behaviour in terms of both wealth and poverty. Some well-off participants expressed guilt about their non-environmental behaviour, since their prosperity enabled them to disregard acting environmentally. Some were unconcerned about wide disparities in wealth in society, and believed or hoped that individuals who create wealth spend money and thus benefit others in society. Karen, living on a low income, could not understand why people needed to make very large amounts of money and would not act altruistically. The positions taken by these well-off participants would be examples of environmental privilege and the right to exploit others. Most participants agreed that being poor made it hard to live environmentally, and poorer participants struggled to act environmentally on low incomes. However, people on low incomes cannot afford many aspects of ways of life involving high carbon expenditure, so they inevitably have low carbon footprints – even if it seems to them that being less well off prevents them from acting in environmentally friendly ways.

These internal contradictions also emerge in the combinations of affiliations between egalitarian, hierarchical and individualistic positions in cultural theory terms.

**Summing up**

There was clear evidence of both negation and disavowal in much of the data. This included scepticism about and ignorance of climate science, a willingness to avoid responsibility for the effects of carbon dioxide emissions and consequent climate change, and some recognition of how technology affects our relations with each other and with the natural world. These findings are consistent with many of the results of the considerable research literature into thoughts and feelings about climate change. There was almost no evidence of any recognition of the interrelatedness of the ecologies of mind, society and nature.
Some important, unexpected positive factors emerged from the data regarding participants’ thoughts and feelings about climate change. A sense of empowerment was connected to a willingness to act on climate change. A close relationship with an environmentally minded parent, particularly a mother, who modelled environmentally friendly behaviour, seemed to dispose people towards pro-environmental thoughts and feelings. And a childhood attachment to a particular rural environment seemed associated with pro-environmental thoughts and feelings, perhaps acting as a metaphorical maternal holding environment. None of these findings are surprising, but I have found few references in the literature to these factors, apart from the significance of an attachment to a particular countryside place.

The central finding is that all participants had complex and contradictory thoughts and feelings regarding all sorts of aspects of the problems and dilemmas thrown up in relation to climate change and the environment. These complexities were most apparent in their thoughts and feelings about environmental activism and activists, and about material wealth or poverty, in that prosperity does not necessarily create pro-environmental behaviour.
Chapter 10: Conclusions

Introduction

This chapter draws together various themes from the overall thesis. I start by returning to where I began, describing my motivation for undertaking the PhD and the nature of the problem of climate change. I set out my original research aims, objectives and research questions, and consider how far these terms of reference were justified and how the research I have undertaken has answered those issues. I then consider the methodological issues raised in my research hypotheses and finish by outlining some implications of my work for practice and research.

Overseas development has been a long-term interest of mine since University in the 1950s. I was a volunteer teacher with Voluntary Service Overseas in Aden from 1960–1, and I have had a continuing interest in overseas development since then. In the course of an MA in Globalisation, Development and Transition (2006–8) I became aware that climate change affects the entire world but has particularly dire consequences for the developing world, so since then it has become my central concern.

The concept of denial

This thesis is founded on the hypothesis – based on the evidence of emissions of greenhouse gases and climatic changes hitherto, and predictive models of future climatic change – that climate change is a progressive threat to the prevailing global ecosystem and that it is possible and essential to prevent this happening. There has been a widespread resistance or indifference to these findings, and denial is a convenient term to summarise a wide range of these reactions.

Starting with a commonsense view of denial, I found as I explored its theoretical basis that it is more complex than I had thought. I also concluded that a psycho-social approach can identify conflicts and contradictions within the individual and is therefore an appropriate methodology to explore denial. In Chapter 2 I outline the theoretical distinction between the psychoanalytic concepts of negation, accepting a fact but denying its significance, and disavowal, splitting oneself so that opposite beliefs can be sustained at the same time. Thus when Charles implied that he cut himself off from unwelcome feelings, perhaps guilt feelings, it was an example of disavowal:
I don’t feel guilty, no I don’t feel guilty. I mean I, I, I sort of, I, I put up a kind of, I put up a wall.

When Victor said that he could ignore the effects of flying to India and back, this was an example of negation.

What [his flight to India] means: what that nine hours of plane in the sky there and nine hours back meant for the environment – we didn’t consider. Even though we are both intelligent enough to know that lots of other people doing that is probably not sustainable.

I provide an account of denial in Chapter 2, and in Chapter 9 I report my findings regarding denial, suggesting that the two concepts, negation and disavowal, are interrelated and overlapping. My data suggests that negation occurs more frequently than disavowal, which involves a mental split that involves a departure from everyday rationality. In most cases forms of denial are clearly one or the other, but sometimes a particular example can be read as either negation or disavowal, which diminishes the effectiveness of the analytic distinction between the two.

The concept of ‘denial’ is controversial partly because climate change denial has been equated with Holocaust denial. Rosenberg (2015) quoted the Associated Press as saying, ‘those who reject climate science say the phrase denier has the pejorative ring of Holocaust denier so The Associated Press prefers climate change doubter or someone who rejects mainstream science.’ Rosenberg continued,

Climate change denial is actually much worse than Holocaust denial. Holocaust denial deals with the deaths of millions in the past, which it did nothing to cause, however morally odious it surely is. Global warming denial deals with the deaths of millions in the future, which it helps to cause, by crippling efforts to prevent them.

Many would argue that this is extreme, but it illustrates the problem of the use of the term denial. UCL Policy Commission on Communicating Climate Science (2014: 110–11) preferred to use the term ‘dismissers’ rather than ‘deniers’, since ‘denial’ is divisive and implies an intention to win a debate rather than engage in dialogue. However, this is only semantic, and over time the term ‘dismissal’ could acquire just as oppositional an overtone as ‘denial’. ‘Dismissal’ lacks the strength of the psychoanalytic concept of ‘denial’ outlined in Chapter 2, the sense in which I use the term ‘denial’ in this thesis.

Denial is admittedly a questionable concept. Furthermore, denial is ambiguous, and can mean the act of saying that something is not true, or refusing to accept unacceptable or painful reality. Therefore I

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accept that I must justify my treatment of those who disagree with me as in denial. I propose to examine the concept by way of Freud’s concepts of denial, negation and disavowal.

Trevor and Benjamin were both philanthropic. Trevor explicitly denied the science of climate change – which would be neither negation nor disavowal but actual denial (Cohen 2001) – and saw environmental issues as secondary to human rights issues. Benjamin acknowledged climate science but saw poverty alleviation as paramount over concerns about climate change, which is an example of negation. Their denial or negation of climate change meant that they were arguing against or negating the established facts of increasing atmospheric carbon dioxide, rising global atmospheric and ocean temperatures, and diminishing polar and glacial ice – and scientific modelling of future climate changes. Against that, Trevor might fairly argue that when I prioritise climate change I negate the implications of the facts of human rights violations, and Benjamin could rightly assert that I negate the facts of worldwide poverty and deprivation. Denial is a widely accepted psychological phenomenon. I believe that the consequences of unmitigated climate change are much graver than continuing human rights abuses or the continuation of poverty, but I concede that what the individual selects as real defines what he regards as denial.

Research aims, objectives and questions

In this section I outline my original research objectives and questions. I consider issues raised in the research data broadly under the categories described in the preceding chapters, and then outline whether and how far the data confirms or disputes the original hypotheses and questions.

The action of denying something: she shook her head in denial
1.1 [count noun] A statement that something is not true: his pious denials of responsibility
1.2 The refusal of something requested or desired: the denial of insurance to people with certain medical conditions
1.3 Refusal to acknowledge an unacceptable truth or emotion or to admit it into consciousness, used as a defence mechanism: I was an addict in denial
1.4 short for self-denial.
1.5 Refusal to acknowledge someone as one’s leader.
1. A refusal to comply with or satisfy a request.
2.
   a. A refusal to grant the truth of a statement or allegation; a contradiction.
   b. Law The formal challenge by a defendant of the truth of an allegation made by the plaintiff.
3.
   a. A refusal to accept or believe something, such as a doctrine or belief.
   b. Psychology An unconscious defense mechanism characterized by refusal to acknowledge painful realities, thoughts, or feelings.
4. The act of disowning or disavowing; repudiation.
I originally defined my overall aim as to investigate factors underlying thoughts and feelings about climate change. As a result of my first seven interviews (part of my psycho-social research training) I decided that, on its own, the concept of climate change can be remote and hard to engage with. This is borne out by studies referred to in Chapter 2 which found that people see climate change as distant, secondary to their immediate concerns, and not immediately threatening. This led me to expand my field of enquiry to include thoughts and feelings about climate change and the environment. I have provided greater details of this decision below (in c. New objectives emerging in the course of my research).

I began the PhD with wide-ranging and ambitious objectives, including the aim of comparing the power of explanations drawing upon cultural theory and on psychoanalysis. The experience of doing the research has led me to more limited but realisable objectives; nevertheless, my original research questions have to some extent provided me with an enduring compass for conducting my investigation.

The following are my original research questions:

How does family and personal development interrelate with people’s work and family roles and values in relation to feelings and views about the mitigation of climate change?

Does the fact of having or expecting to have children or grandchildren affect their attitude?

Do their thoughts and feelings about their development, their work and their family, and climate change mitigation, correspond to the classification system of cultural theory?

Can their thoughts and feelings be interpreted within psychoanalytic frameworks?

What part does their sense of belonging to a culture influence this?

Psycho-social research calls for the researcher to reflexively be aware of his or her value structures and underlying motivations. My research was based in the explicit belief that climate change threatens the safety and well-being of future generations worldwide and that action is needed urgently to prevent this threat being fulfilled. However, taking a psycho-social stance, it was necessary to research both concern for and scepticism concerning climate change.

In hindsight, I see numerous flaws in these aims and questions. In practice, my research has attempted to answer my research questions 1, 2 and 5. Questions 3 and 4 focused on methodological issues rather than on theories about thoughts and feelings regarding climate change. However, a normal part
of the PhD task is to reflexively examine and modify research aims, hypotheses and questions. In summary, my research aims and objectives have evolved over time even if my research questions have remained relatively enduring. As I stated in Chapter 1, my overall research aim is ‘to examine family, social and economic factors (including unconscious factors) affecting people’s thoughts and feelings for or against action on climate change and the environment’.

Psychoanalytic theory

Psychoanalytic theories have proved to be an effective means of analysing many aspects of people’s denial of the need to act on climate change, although on their own they provide only partial explanations of denial. Among my participants, paranoid–schizoid splitting and projection occurred widely. Experiences within families of origin, particularly relationships with mothers, often proved to be influential. Issues to do with rivalry, envy or greed did not stand out. Some participants acknowledged their own resistance to change, others observed it in other people. Generally, I can affirm that psychoanalysis is an effective analytic and explanatory framework in answer to question 4 above.

Cultural theory

One of my research hypotheses was that ‘egalitarians’ and ‘self-transcendals’ – described by cultural theory (M. Thompson 2003) and values–beliefs–norms (VBN) theory (P. Stern et al. 1999), described in Chapter 3 – are less in denial about the need for action over climate change than ‘individualists’, ‘hierarchists’ and ‘self-enhancers’. Hence the paranoid–schizoid splitting that I outline in Chapter 9 is consistent with the individualist and self-enhancing or hierarchist positions, and the depressive position is more in line with an egalitarian or self-transcending position. Applying cultural theory and other associated theories impressionistically to my data, egalitarians and self-transcendals are more concerned about action on climate change. Most respondents manifest mixtures of hierarchical, individualist and egalitarian attitudes, with different cultural positions in the ascendant, and there was no simplistic finding that egalitarians and self-transcendals are less in denial about climate change than individualists and hierarchists. This illustrates and supports the finding that my participants all had psychologically complex positions about climate change and the environment. However, many people with environmental inclinations are more egalitarian than others – often the product of a greater degree of self-doubt and self-questioning, which suggests that overt guilt is nearer the surface for them than it is for individualists and hierarchists.
Beneath the complexity of different theoretical approaches to thoughts and feelings about and denial of climate change, I examine in Chapter 9 some common themes that emerge which unite psychological, sociological and cultural theories.

New objectives emerging in the course of my research

Early in my research, I broadened my focus to include peoples’ thoughts and feelings about the environment. Climate change, though supremely important, is one aspect of interlocking, complex and multi-layered political, economic, cultural, legal, environmental and ecological problems – so it is not susceptible to a simplistic approach. A focus on the environment enabled participants to respond to a more immediate question, and the environment is also more relevant to my research given my developing focus on ecology, as I describe below – but this did not prevent a focus on climate change as a central environmental concern.

Admittedly, including participants’ thoughts and feelings about the environment has led to some blurring. In analysing my participants’ interviews, I have sometimes identified issues to do with climate change, sometimes issues about the environment, and participants’ interests and concerns have often focused on the environment but not always strictly on climate change. This justified my conclusion that just focusing on climate change as a subject lacked a broader interest and appeal, but I acknowledge that not distinguishing clearly between them is a conceptual weakness in this research. If nothing else, this illustrates how my research process has opened up new ideas and insights.

The publication of Joseph Dodds’ book *Psychoanalysis and Ecology at the Edge of Chaos* (Dodds 2011) during my research led to my developing a stronger theoretical focus on the interrelationship between the ecologies of mind, society and nature. I realised that climate change and the environment are part of the wider conceptual field of ecology, which made me aware that the problem of climate change and environmental problems are the result of humanity having ecologically over-reached the carrying capacity of its environment. Ecological matters almost never emerged in my interviews with participants, though I might have elicited data about this if I had included an ecological element in my original research aims.

The finding that a number of participants felt that their environmental and climate concerns sprang from an attachment to a particular natural environment led me to an understanding of the importance of place in childhood.
Methodology

Recognising the complex and unconscious factors governing people’s thoughts and feelings about climate change, a qualitative approach to research seemed the best way to account for the almost universal and manifold forms of climate change denial. I was attracted to psycho-social methodology because my psychoanalytic psychotherapy background meant that I felt in tune with its aim of understanding people’s underlying unconscious motivations.

However, I do agree with many of the opinions advanced in the papers about psycho-social studies and research that I outline in Chapter 3. There are unresolved contradictions between those who see psycho-social studies as an association between the ‘psycho’, psychological, and the ‘social’, sociological – a ‘suture’ between two separate elements (Frosh and Baraitser 2008: 348) – and those who see them as an amalgam of the two, like the Moebius strip, where inside and outside flow together as one (349).

In this debate I have inevitably leaned towards the Kleinian not the Lacanian perspective. I have drawn on discourse analysis. I can question whether I am sufficiently reflexive, but I cannot confirm from my own clinical and research work what Frosh and Baraitser describe as ‘the “top-down”, expert-knowledge epistemological strategies of psychoanalysis’ (Frosh and Baraitser 2008: 347) or apparent certainties about what is ‘true’ (351–2). I was confused by the unclear distinction between clinical and research work in their arguments and alienated by their advocacy of ‘a kind of critical politics that tests itself through negation’ (350), and their description of the subject as apparently passively subject to external forces does not correspond to my perception of either clinical or research subjects.

However, Frosh and Baraitser’s questioning of the application of the concept of counter-transference to psycho-social research (2008: 361) echoed my own unease. They suggested that researchers discussing how their research participant made them feel might represent an ungrounded expert system of knowledge. I myself doubt, on the basis of thirty years’ psychoanalytic psychotherapy practice, how applicable counter-transference is to the interpretation of research data. The discussion of findings below does show how the data emerged as result of highly textured interviews that involved (amongst other things) a capacity to read both transference and counter transference.

Many would argue that interpreting counter-transference is a skill hard won through considerable clinical experience and requiring constant re-learning, but Hoggett (2008: 381) implied that any
attempt to take counter-transference into account is better than none, arguing persuasively that ‘we communicate affectively as well as discursively … because of the inherent limitations of language’.

Though I did not investigate alternative qualitative-research methodologies, I am satisfied that my choice of this method has productively provided me with a rich range of research data and an analytic method that has produced interesting findings. The results of quantitative research and psychoanalytic writings, provided me with common frameworks and perspectives within which to consider the different interviews. By working frequently over the data I became familiar with it, which allowed new insights to emerge. The unforeseen correlations that appeared in the data were important.

Perhaps this kind of qualitative research depends on the researcher’s convictions more than quantitative research. The psychoanalytic element in psycho-social methodology stands or falls by an acceptance of the centrality of transference and counter-transference in all human relationships. Having struggled with these issues for many years as a psychotherapist, I am convinced that achieving an understanding is possible of the transferences and counter-transferences that I witness.

For instance, at the time, Clive’s long disconcerting pauses during the interview left me uncertain what he felt and how to respond. Afterwards I thought he might be reacting to me in the way that he feels about his remote and difficult father, which would explain my uncertainty and his tentativeness. When frustrated by Benjamin’s cool, thoughtful, professional but impersonal response, I became more challenging than usual, questioning his commitment to social enterprise, perhaps unconsciously attempting to make contact with him, feeling that I had not established a good rapport. The way that neither of us referred to his African ethnicity might have contributed to this. I refer to questions of counter-transference in Chapter 3.

I describe the FANI method in Chapter 4. With hindsight, I could have applied the method better. I conducted one interview only with each participant, not two. I made contact with potential participants through personal contacts of various kinds, which I am satisfied has not significantly contaminated the data. My sample of participants was satisfactory as regards age and gender, but they were almost exclusively middle class and white British, and I am content that my data from this specific sample represents a full and interesting range of thoughts and feelings about climate change and the environment, although participants from a wider social and ethnic spectrum would have been advantageous.

I found that there was a conflict between encouraging and enabling the participant to establish his or her narrative, and retaining a focus on the topic being researched, and at different times one of these
objectives had to give way to the other. I have not come across references to this dilemma in the psycho-social literature.

I was sorry not to be able to assemble any data panel to review my analysis, but I feel confident in the analysis I have conducted with the support of supervisors and colleagues. Taking the psycho-social methodology of thinking about the defended researcher has enabled me to incorporate deficiencies in my interviewing practice into my analysis. A second or subsequent interview would have allowed for re-examining particular issues arising in the first interview in greater depth, and might have revealed how far the participant’s thoughts and feelings were fixed or had changed.

Findings

In Chapter 9 I focus on the validity of the concepts of denial, disavowal and negation; on the parallels and overlaps between psychological and sociological theory, particularly as regards denial; on the impact of early life history and experience; and on the complexities and contradictions of participants’ thoughts and feelings about climate change. In this section, I elaborate further some of the complexities.

Applying a psycho-social approach in my research, (informed by psychological and sociological theories), has produced an extensive range of interview data and using a psycho-social lens in my analysis has enabled me to draw some significant conclusions.

I chose to present my findings by first focusing on an in-depth study of data from two contrasting participants, Francis and Holly, because their thoughts and feelings could be seen as representing comparable thoughts and feelings across the whole range of my participants. I have summarised themes and findings emerging from their interviews in Chapter 9. Both were well informed and aware of climate change issues. They illustrated different aspects of psychological self-awareness, and of denial of the need to mitigate climate change. Comparing data from Francis and Holly illustrates that many people’s thoughts and feelings about climate change and the environment are complex and contradictory. Some are openly in internal conflict, others who apparently have clear views may have underlying hidden conflicts.

I followed this by considering themes from my data illustrated by vignettes drawn primarily from their interviews plus data from interviews with another eight participants, supplemented as appropriate by data from other participants. Virtually all my participants expressed degrees of uncertainty and ambivalence about climate change, which emerged most strongly in some
participants’ strong attachment to air travel despite being fully aware of its harmful environmental effects. All participants found themselves feeling and acting in contradictory ways.

Both being well off and being hard up were used to justify non-environmental behaviour, which illustrates this complexity further. Several participants argued that people will be more environmentally active the better off they are, but people found many different ways to justify acting non-environmentally, and their choices were often not dictated by financial concerns.

As identified in Chapter 9, internal contradictions also emerge in participants’ differing combinations of egalitarian, hierarchical and individualistic affiliations in cultural theory terms. In Chapter 9 I put together various ways that splitting and projection operated throughout my interview data. Earlier generations devoted thought and care to us their heirs, endowing us with a rich material and intellectual inheritance, but my participants could not consider the interests of future generations beyond children and grandchildren. This might to do with today’s rapid pace of change and a greater difficulty in imagining the future. The surveys I found expressing concerns over what our approach to future generations should be, focused on relations between today’s older and younger generations, and were not concerned with grandchildren and beyond. There were widespread findings that today’s younger generation will be worse off than their parents (Kohut 2014, Mendes 2011, Ipsos MORI Global Trends Survey 2014, Cillizza 2014)

However, an Ipsos MORI poll conducted for the Foundation for Democracy and Sustainable Development and the Intergenerational Foundation (2011) found that almost two thirds of British people thought all future generations’ needs should take priority when we think about sharing the earth’s resources; and nearly half thought passing on a healthy planet is more important than passing on a thriving economy, safety and security, or an unspoilt countryside – intriguingly different from the 2014 Ipsos MORI Global Trends Survey quoted above.

These pessimistic views about the future are in striking contrast to the optimism of the post-war period with its belief in progress. Buchanan (2009: 1239) noted how appeals to a duty to future generations are a staple of political rhetoric, but my data suggests that today only a two-generational vision of the future of mankind is possible. Perhaps pessimism about the future does not undermine a determination, at least rhetorically, to do whatever one can to protect future generations.

29 Buchanan quoted President George W. Bush in a speech on 10 July 2007, invoking listeners’ progeny: ‘I want to tell you, yes, we can accomplish and win this fight in Iraq. And … I want to tell you, we must, for the sake of our children and our grandchildren’.
In Chapter 9 I describe ways that participants disavowed their knowledge of climate change, including climate science, disregarding unwelcome facts or treating them as irrelevant, treating climate change as incomprehensible or disclaiming responsibility.

Air travel and recycling are activities with environmental consequences, but also metaphors that participants used to represent their thoughts and feelings about climate change and the environment. Flying symbolised entitlement to travel, freedom of the skies and pleasure regardless of the cost to present and future generations, but also contact with and awareness of other cultures. Recycling was perhaps a general metaphor for acting environmentally, sometimes done perfunctorily, sometimes carrying moral overtones and sometimes representing conflicts over the difficulties of acting environmentally.

As I describe in Chapter 9, some participants felt empowered to take action over climate change and were correspondingly more able to engage with mitigation. They did seem to come from secure family relationships, and to have established themselves securely in the social world. I had not anticipated the marked difference between those who felt empowered and those feeling disempowered. There were interrelationships between a sense of agency, resorting less to denial, and pro-environmental action. Those feeling disempowered would sometimes shift responsibility away from themselves to locate it elsewhere. The media were often blamed – for failing to keep the public’s attention on climate change, or for staying within the limits of what the public would accept. Arguably responsibility belongs at psychological and personal, social and intergenerational levels.

Willingness to be active and to campaign was associated with a country upbringing and having a parent figure, often a mother, attuned to the natural world. This is consistent with how the metaphor of the mother has been seen as representing the earth and the natural world (Randall 2005; Ryland 2000). An associated finding was that having or having had a dog or other experience of animals correlated with an environmental position. Correspondingly, an urban upbringing could often be associated with a lack of interest in climate change or the environment. Two participants who had lived in the inner city for many years but had spent part of their childhood in the country each had a strong feeling, one for a piece of garden or small park near her home, the other for a glimpse of park from her flat. Neither came over as having had a strong relationship with her mother, but the association of earlier experiences of the country and a longing and need for green space in the city was striking. However, no corresponding pattern emerged of the influence of fathers compared to mothers. Several participants were implicitly or explicitly critical of their fathers; in a few cases fathers did not appear in their narratives, and only one participant saw his father as a strong influence. Perhaps it is no surprise that many of my participants had been much influenced in their thoughts and feelings about climate change and the environment by their families of origin.
The finding that maternal influences are important is reinforced by the finding in my data of a strong link between some of my participants’ attachment to place and their mothers’ influence. As discussed in Chapter 3, there is a debate as to how far attachment to place is secondary to parental influences and attachments, or is independent from them (Chawla 1992: 63). Spitzform (2000: 272) referred to the attachment theory ‘visual cliff’ experiment, where an infant typically turns to the caretaker before deciding whether to crawl onto a sheet of clear plexiglass, demonstrating that the caretaker’s affective response to the infant’s environment is important. Heneghan (2013), Bodnar (2012: 28–9) and Birkeland and Aasen (2012: 112–13) described how early experiences of the natural world may shape future mental health and attitudes to environmental matters. The data also supports Bodnar’s (2008: 504) view that the experience of the natural environment provides children with a domain free from the pressures of human relationships.

Moss (2012: 5–11) confirmed my findings in reporting how childhood experience of the natural world can inspire people to an environmental approach. He described Nature Deficit Disorder, suggesting that children who miss out on a connection with the natural world lack an understanding as adults of the importance of nature to human society. Contact with nature can improve our children’s physical fitness through increased activity, improve the way children learn, and benefit communities and society as a whole. He quoted a UNICEF study that reported that children in the UK, Spain and Sweden told researchers that their happiness is dependent on having time with a stable family and plenty of things to do, especially outdoors. Widespread evidence suggests that the strongest environmental sensibilities in adulthood stem from childhood experiences of unstructured play in natural environments, including potentially damaging activities. Bird (2007) cited repeated studies suggesting that childhood experience of nature before the age of 11 strongly influenced later positive adult attitudes towards the environment. All these reports strongly support my findings of a link between childhood experiences of nature and a later sensitivity towards the environment.

The finding that few participants saw any explicit awareness interrelationships between the ecologies of mind, society and the natural world is perhaps unsurprising but dispiriting. Only a few manifested a mainly unconscious sense of links between the worlds of the mind, society and the natural world. Two participants felt conscious of the deficit in education of awareness of the natural world in our urbanised, technological society, which may contribute to an understanding of the low priority of environmental matters including climate change among my participants and in our society.

A psycho-social approach, communities of identity, and the roles of mothers
In this section I illustrate different kinds of complexity within the data of interviews with Gloria and Holly, Edward and Simon, Victor, Francis, Rosemary and Arthur, and how they could be viewed as examples of: open contradictions, splitting, passivity, moral neutrality and worked through contradictions. Such complexities are explored in Chapters 2 and 3, which deal with psychological and social theories concerning attitudes towards climate change. Here I draw a distinction between people who consciously express self-contradictory positions, and other kinds of positions, and how some people have reached worked out conclusions over contradictory positions. Within this I show how powerful emotions lead to conflicts in people’s communities of identity; and seek to understand the differing roles of the mothers of the participants.

Open contradictions

Gloria and Holly

Gloria and Holly in different ways are examples of participants who expressed open contradictions in their feelings and views. Gloria was not completely easy to interview as her expressed uncertainties left her remarks in an unresolved position, leaving me to take a further initiative. At this point I became aware of an open contradiction between her positions. It was hard to enable her to establish much of a narrative. She was caught in a self aware way between two sides of herself. A humanitarian side, provoked by the suffering caused by great 2004 tsunami, and her social circle, which included nobody with similar interests and who would go with her on demonstrations. And a pleasure-loving side which enjoyed going out, travelling, sport and so on. She was also at a turning point where she was considering giving up her job in a NGO and turning to business consultancy. She was also divided between feeling that NGOs in developing countries should employ equally well qualified people as westerners; but she would always want to be paid at a western salary level. Gloria had had an interest in climate change but said that since there had been less focus on it in the media, her interest had declined. Clearly, living an enjoyable London life with friends, and decisions about her future career, took priority over environmental issues.

Holly on the other hand expressed some contradictory thoughts and feelings some of which she was aware of, some of them not. She had freely expressed and definite opinions, the interview flowed freely, and I could enable her to establish a narrative. She was quite aware of the contradiction of having environmental leanings yet enthusiastically flying and heli-skiing. She seemed less aware of the contradiction between her diplomatic and her passionately committed sides, her feeling she could only be influenced by matters she had seen with her own eyes, yet encouraging the children in school to locate places all over the world on a map, and of suggesting that everybody should work part time
regardless of finance. I felt pleased about her enthusiasm for recycling, for outdoor activities and for the natural world, but I reacted against her frank admission of acting non-environmentally because she is able to financially even though she implicitly admitted guilt feeling about it. I responded warmly to her general enthusiasm for her life.

Gloria was more openly ambivalent in her feelings, often finishing statements by saying, ‘I don’t know’. Holly’s ambivalence was expressed in an optimistic attitude towards the future, but mitigated by her saying questioningly that she hoped that it would be so

Gloria is the only child of a Bangladeshi father and Filipino mother, brought up in suburban England, so she might have been expected to have some conflicts about her identity. She had nothing to say about her parents, and did not acknowledge any problems with her identity. Her tentativeness, her dividedness regarding her future and the importance of conforming to the interpretive community of her social circle, might all unconsciously express uncertainty about herself.

Holly is the oldest of the four children of an English couple who have spent their life in Switzerland in the diplomatic world. This left her with a feeling of never fully belonging anywhere. She identified herself as a typical oldest child, taking charge of her younger siblings, which, combined with her skill at languages, meant that teaching would be her inevitable career. When they were younger she thought the family had limited finances, and her parents have always been careful to mend and repair things and not throw them away, and she took on that attitude in becoming passionately committed to recycling and intolerant of those who do not recycle. This was the only time she mentioned her parents. Having come from a family with relatively modest means, she is married to a merchant banker and is financially well off, and perhaps her family’s more constrained finances and her position of authority as the oldest left her with a sense of entitlement to spend money sometimes non-environmentally.

Gloria’s contradictions uncertainty and ambivalence were brought out by a free-ranging interview that enabled her to express her uncertainties and contradictions. She kept away from her feelings about her parents, perhaps because of some unresolved feelings about them. Her reserve might perhaps have been less evident outside a psycho-social interview.

Gloria’s strongly felt humanitarian instinct was at strong variance with her interpretive community of young fun-loving young people of her own age and her drift towards commercial consultancy.

Gloria said nothing about either of her parents beyond their ethnicity. They seemed to have played no part in forming either her humanitarianism or her movement towards the business and commercial world.
Holly expressed herself freely, and the method enabled her to develop her narrative of her Swiss background, her position in the family and its link with her enthusiasm for teaching, her total commitment to recycling and to outdoor activities, her partial commitment to environmentalism under her in-laws’ influence, and her ability to disregard inconvenient facts under the influence of her optimistic approach.

Holly manifested an intensely felt implicit emotional contradiction, between an environmentalist community of identity associated with her sister-in-law and her husband, and her commitment to her school and the environment, and a community of identity associated with frequent flying and unpaid voluntary and part-time work.

Her account of her relationship with her parents was impersonal, although she saw them as having transmitted some core values of hers to do with not throwing things away and particularly re-cycling, and she attributed her diplomatic approach to her father’s career as an international diplomat. Holly’s relationship with her mother was not prominent in our interview.

Having considered findings around open contradictions, I will now move on to discuss the processes I observed around splitting.

Splitting:

Edward and Simon

Splitting by dividing the world into separated idealised and disparaged elements is a feature of Klein’s paranoid-schizoid position, a radical defensive measure designed to preserve the idealised thoughts and feelings from the threat from despised threatening elements. Edward and Simon are examples of participants who displayed such strongly polarised thoughts and feelings and were convinced climate sceptics. Their positions could be seen as false resolutions of contradictions treated as ‘solutions’.

Edward was a strongly partisan climate sceptic, involved in arranging talks by leading climate sceptics at his place of work. He held extreme views about climate activists, describing them as hating the human race. When I invited him to reflect about his earlier life and how this had shaped his feelings and views about climate change, he immediately made it clear his view that people’s feelings
and views would not have been shaped by their earlier experiences, and thus defended himself against
testing about his own position. He attributed his position on climate change to his legal background
and a belief in the importance of fairness, believing that climate sceptics were not being given a fair
hearing. He felt strongly that free speech was just hugely important, and fair play. As we went on it
became clear that he felt passionately on the subject, describing the treatment of prominent climate
sceptics as absolutely outrageous, and describing climate activists as people that don't like the human
race and want to see us punished for our sins, quoting Hitler as an extreme example. He described a
professor with well-known climate sceptic views having had speaking slots at universities withdrawn
because of pressures from the climate change people, and thought at the time, ‘that's outrageous, just
outrageous’. Edward clearly had passionate feelings about climate sceptics being silenced, but this
contradicted his saying that he couldn’t say who was right or wrong, but that he could say with no fear
of contradiction that there are two sides.

As Edward had ruled out considering that his earlier life might have influenced his feelings and views,
it is not possible to form a view of the genesis of his thoughts and feelings, but one might infer that he
had suffered injustice at some point in his life which had impelled him to seek justice and to campaign
for the underdog. He denied following any interpretive community, but clearly felt he had much in
common with conservative-voting friends. His feelings and views were so opposite to mine that I had
to subdue my own feelings and confined myself to following the trajectory of his thinking, only
clarifying points from time to time.

Simon was a theatre technician, also a climate sceptic, who saw a sharp divide between people who
worked in the theatre and those who did not. His strongly idealised view of theatre and theatre people,
was expressed in his view of theatre as ever changing, potentially changing someone’s life, seeing
famous people, working in schools, being with ‘eight incredibly talented interesting people’ in theatre
planning who have never ‘done anything sort of mediocre in life, everyone has gone travelling’ with
‘a different sense of humour; because everyone is a bit more confident’. He saw this as different from
other work, where you could ‘get sacked if you say a swear word’. Simon also saw a sharp divide
between the city, where you can always get a signal on a mobile, and the countryside, where there
may be no signal, it is isolating. People are in their own little communities and there is not a lot of
debate, and ‘in the countryside it is just you. You are left with your thoughts’. He projected negative
motives onto the media about climate change, suggesting that making films about climate change was
scare-mongering to make you feel bad and ‘as if it is your fault’.
Simon never knew his father who died in his infancy, and he was an only child brought up by his mother as a single parent. He made it clear that she had been devoted to his wellbeing, and that when she saw him as unsure of himself because in part of his poor education, she got him involved in youth theatre, which led on to his finding his way into and establishing himself as a theatre technician. There were things that Simon described that I admired, but his views and feelings were so different from my own that it was hard not to react against them. I empathised with his strongly felt gratitude and admiration for his mother and her sensitive approach to his upbringing as an only child, but I reacted against his dismissive attitude towards his ‘indifferent’ school, even though some teachers recognised potential in him. I was ambivalent about his uninhibited account of his own success in theatre, feeling that he was probably entitled to feel proud but reacting against his referring to his own success. I also reacted against his uncritical idealisation of theatre and theatre people, splitting them from ‘ordinary people’, and disturbed by his account of an unhealthy way of life with little or no time off over long periods working in the dark with no natural light and limited time for relationship and friends. I also reacted against his negative attitude towards the country as containing small minded people, and his view of media as seeking to engender guilt in the public. He evidently followed an interpretive community centred in the world of theatre, which could be seen as originating in his mother’s strong, positive influence.

The use of psycho-social methodology enabled Edward to express and explore his passionate feelings about climate change activism and activists, to develop a clear narrative of the development of his views, and to express some of the contradictions of his position.

Edward was passionately committed to a community of identity that supported professional balance, justice and fairness, which was completely opposed to his equally passionate commitment to a community of identity that involved unequivocal advocacy of climate scepticism.

From the outset Edward made it clear that he was not open to discussing the effect of his earlier life on his feelings and views, and he did not mention either his mother or his father in the course of the interview.

The method enabled Simon to describe a clear narrative of his childhood and development under his mother’s guidance and support. My mixed and predominantly negative counter-transference was important in reaching a deeper understanding of Simon’s position. In this scenario, Simon’s mother, who had apparently had no environmental orientation, had played a key and decisive role in his development, including his lack of interest in the environment and his reaction against the country, and his passionate all-consuming love of the theatre.
The interviews with Edward and with Simon illustrate my struggle not to be a defended interviewer. The invitation to take part in the splitting and projection that they presented was constantly present.

Having considered the more psychically active processes of splitting by contrast I now consider the issues of passivity.

Passivity

Victor

Taking a passive position where responsibility for important decisions is left to others can be seen as a resistance to and defence against taking on full responsibility for oneself and reaching maturity. Victor can be seen as an example of this form of defence. Victor is the younger of two sons and was brought up in the West London suburbs. He trained in design, and is still very interested in design and architecture. After some years working in the field of design, he moved to teaching, which he finds enjoyable and interesting. He described an element of drifting into it. He is fully aware of and concerned about man-made climate change.

I empathised with his interest in the natural world and the environment; which sprang from a childhood interest in the weather, and outdoor activities such as surfing and camping which both call for interest in and knowledge of weather. I also liked his admiration for his father-in-law’s refusal to engage with consumerism, and his grandparents’ more self-sufficient way of life. I liked his celebration of the suburban life of his childhood. However I was frustrated by his being passive and cautious. He thought he was a bit more left wing than was prudent. He described his wife taking many important decisions about their life, he thought that there might come a time when they might have to change their ways regarding air travel, but for the moment he prioritised holidays involving air travel over environmental damage from air travel. He thought that air travel is like eating meat, one is aware of the negative ways that meat is produced but one can put it to the back of one’s mind.

His interpretive communities would have been the world of design, of teaching and of his outdoor activities particularly surfing. In his social world, and hence his interpretive community, people recycled but didn’t do other things environmentally. He did have some friends who have rejected flying and a consumerist way of life, and implicitly admired them for it.
He thought that he had been influenced by both parents more or less equally. There was an element of nostalgia in his enthusiasms. He yearned for a simpler life, one less pressurised by social media and consumerism, spoke of feeling free from all that when camping and on holidays, and admired the way that his parents-in-law lived a semi self-sufficient and non-consumerist way of life, the way his grandparents grew their own food, and his socialist prominent scientist grandfather, Both his parents have had careers, and he described a sense of family life with lots of free and stimulating discussion of ideas.

A psycho-social approach did not succeed in elucidating how his clear ideas and powerful and passionate feelings were curbed by his passivity and caution and his reluctance to face his own left wing feelings. It is difficult to avoid making a psychotherapeutic assessment but naturally each meeting and conversation has its limits. Victor felt strongly about the environment, and particularly weather, pertinent to his love of surfing, but was equally committed to an opposing community of identity associated with air travel and holidays in distant places regardless of the environmental damage of flying. I sense his passivity was rooted in something that he was not talking about, but that as I was not doing psychotherapy with him, this is the level the interview settled at.

Victor was an example of a participant with environmental feelings whose mother had not influenced him in that direction. He discussed his father, brother and grandfather more than his mother, though he did hint that she may have been a stronger influence. This might be supported by his repeatedly describing how his wife was the decision-maker in their relationship.

This section has dealt with the question of passivity, the next section considers moral neutrality.

Moral neutrality

Francis

Adopting a position of moral neutrality where issues are seen in purely practical and instrumental terms, disregarding any moral implications, can be seen as a defensive manoeuvre, to disguise complexities, to keep oneself hidden and perhaps to avoid inconvenient commitments. Francis can be seen as a good example of this position. I have given a full account of my interview with him in Chapter 5. This is not to suggest that he was immoral, he clearly upheld family and academic values, as expressed in his positive feelings about both parents, his wife and his children, and his commitment.
to his academic work. As discussed in Chapter 5, Francis at one point said that he would not justify his position over climate change in moral terms, and described being aware of injustice in a way that didn’t impinge on his comfort. This apparently dealt with the implied contradiction between his expedient environmentalism and his indifference to the implications of climate change. He also described being aware of the vast amounts of aviation fuel used by aeroplanes without it having any impact on his thoughts and feelings. Another example was his justification of oil companies selling oil as being like arms dealers, implying that when somebody sells something, as for instance with arms, they are not responsible for how it is used. One could question whether he was simply being straightforwardly honest about himself and his motives, or whether he was involved in a semi-conscious cover-up of his mixed feelings and doubts.

His use of the concept of comfort, illustrated above, might imply that this, as well as his commitment to his family and his academic work, might represent his most strongly experienced emotion, though equally it is possible that he would not or could not reveal what his most important values and emotions were. Possibly his moral neutrality overlapped with an emotional neutrality. It was also hard to form an impression of what his interpretive community would be other than his professional world. He described feeling different from some of his colleagues who had no experience outside the world of public service, compared to his experience of the corporate world through his wife.

I twice went blank during the interview and I am still undecided what unconscious counter-transference factors in me caused this. He spoke in a careful, considered and measured way, and it is possible that I was somehow intimidated by this. Perhaps his conscious neutrality disguised contradictions that I connected to by losing my train of thought. He admired his scientist father and had been influenced by his early climate scepticism, but implied an understanding of psychoanalytic thought in implying an unresolved Oedipal situation between him and his father, whom he had challenged in various ways including his reluctance to learn to drive, knowing that he would have been pleased if he had. There were times when in retrospect I think he was mounting an Oedipal challenge to me, potentially seeing me as a climate activist he needed to challenge. By contrast, he described an easy and relaxed relationship with his mother. His unresolved feelings about his father and the fact of depending on his comfortable way of life on his wife’s work for a fossil fuel corporation may have undermined his sense of agency and independence, and contributed to his position of moral neutrality.

The method allowed Francis to express his apparent neutrality and moral detachment. It also enabled him to provide some clues in the form of his unresolved relationship with his father and the implications of his depending on his wife’s earnings for his and his family’s comfortable way of life.
He had a close and easy relationship with his mother, which might be an aspect of the unresolved Oedipal situation with his father outlined above. His relationship with her is an example of closeness with a mother that did not provide a lead towards an environmental position.

**Worked through contradictions**

Some participants were in the process of working through or had worked through the complexities and contradictions they faced. Rosemary was an example of a participant who was in the throes of reviewing and working through the conflicts she faced. Arthur had worked out his position and accepted some of the difficulties of resolving the contradiction of his position. These participants could be seen as learning from experience, and therefore more able to do take responsibility for their views and actions. But personal, social and generational responsibilities need to inter-connect in order to meet what is required to counter the defensive processes that explain why we cannot or do not take responsibility for climate change.

**Rosemary**

Rosemary is the third child of a couple with two older sisters and a younger brother, who was brought up in the countryside with considerable freedom to roam, with the strong encouragement of her mother who was active politically and environmentally. She described her childhood country upbringing and relationship with her younger brother, her university education and her immediate involvement thereafter in environmental politics euphorically. The other and more difficult side of things only gradually emerged as the interview progressed, including the death of her brother, her parents’ divorce and the loss of a family home as a young adult, her marriage to a man who turned out to be gay whom she loved and admired very much, his subsequent death from AIDS and her son’s long term mental health problems.

After the immediate period of her entry into environmental politics she found her way into environmental finance, and more recently she was excited by and felt well suited to developing environmental finance in east Asia. However she described, in common with the rest of the financial world, having been left with no solutions when the financial crash of 2007-8 happened. This was compounded by realising that her son needed her, feeling that she had neglected him earlier in his life when her career was developing so fast. This clashed with her plans for developing a career in finance in east Asia. Also, she fell ill with cancer, and she felt that it was significant that it was reproductive
organs that had been affected, as she had always wanted several children, and she had been forced to recognise that this was not going to happen.

I felt a close rapport with her in her account of her values and all that she had achieved, while I also felt daunted by the powerful sense of momentum in her description of her early post-university years. It was clear that the financial crash, her son’s mental illness and her illness had led her to fundamentally question much about what she had worked towards in the years before. She asked herself whether her withdrawing from her work in east Asia was entirely about these factors, or whether it sprang from feeling that she had overreached herself and felt out of her depth. This could be seen as her developing a more questioning approach to her enthusiasms and drives.

It is clear from this that she had a strong sense of passionate and powerful emotions driving her for much of her life towards developing the relatively new field of environmental finance, feeling that she had something unique to contribute. Her mother’s enthusiasm for the countryside, her political commitment and the sense of agency that she had engendered in Rosemary, had all obviously made a strong contribution to these aspects of her. However possibly part of her drive in her early post-university years was a defensive reaction to the death of her brother and her parents’ divorce, which might in turn have encouraged her to marry perhaps prematurely and to someone unable to be the husband that she needed. She described not wanting to be part of a failed generation at that time, and felt that now she was more uncertain and more humble about not having all the answers. She was someone who could be seen as in the process of a profound working through of crucial conflicts and contradictions in her life towards something which could be seen as a depressive position. She had had psychotherapy at a certain point of crisis earlier in her life, which may have contributed to the impression she conveyed of having worked through issues in her life.

I empathised with her, and was affected by but slightly guarded about her euphoric account of her childhood, studies, and early work career. It was hard to keep up with her breathless approach. Retrospectively, I saw strong a contrast between her early career and omnipotence that ‘we would not be a failed generation’, and recent, more complex and difficult career and more humble approach, and I was touched by her account of her husband’s illness and death, which had evidently been a major bereavement.

The method was helpful in enabling Rosemary to provide a full narrative of her development and particularly what I maintain was a movement from a paranoid-schizoid to a depressive position about her life and achievements. It was also helpful in providing her with the opportunity to express her passionate feelings about her work, her husband and his death and her son, representing her
commitments to opposed communities of identity representing her intense belief in environmental finance, and her commitment to her son, his difficulties and his family.

Rosemary was an example of a participant who was close to and strongly influenced towards an interest in the environment by a mother who was herself strongly committed to the environment. This was linked to her attachment to the particular countryside where she grew up. She felt that her mother was still a great support to her, her son and grandson.

Arthur

Arthur is the older son of a couple living in a small town in the west midlands, on the edge of the country. His father worked in car manufacture, while his mother was environmentally interested, had worked for the RSPB, and took him out for walks in the countryside with their dog daily, rain or shine. She had an ornithologist friend who played an important part in developing Arthur’s interest in the natural world. Arthur might easily have become a motoring journalist, building on his father’s motor manufacture background, but his interest in and concern for the natural world prevailed. I explore the importance of relationships with environmentally active mothers in section iv. below.

I felt a strong rapport with Arthur in our interview, evidently based partly on the closeness of our respective world views, but also because of his considerate approach to me. We met in a crowded and noisy cafe, and he was careful to move the microphone closer to him, based on his own experience of journalistic interviewing.

Arthur, inevitably as an environmental journalist, had had to think about and face up to many of the dilemmas and contradictions posed by trying to live an environmentally friendly life. The most obvious of these was the need to travel by air to places where he could research and report on environmental problems. Another dilemma was for friends of his who wanted to go on environmentally friendly holidays, but would need to fly there. He described how as a student he would not buy more expensive but organically produced food. He could see some of the complexities surrounding recycling. People can recycle and feel that that is all they need to do, so they can carry on with anti-environmental behaviour with a clear conscience. He recognised the dilemmas of the media, in their responsibility to report on environmental issues, yet, being dependent on advertising, having to remain not too distant from their public. Similarly, he was clear that oil companies were resisting measures to reduce carbon emissions, but that governments could not do too much to challenge or disrupt them given the amount of tax revenue they generated and their central position in the nation’s pension funds. He admitted that there were many reasons to be pessimistic about future climate
change, but stressed the need for him to be optimistic, which he was able to do in relation to his contracts with younger people.

Arthur was someone that accepted the complexities of climate change and the environment and did not seek to evade the difficulties without any strong defensive response, sometimes simply acknowledging that he did not have an answer to a particular problem or simply that it was difficult. This was a more depressive position response to the complexities of the subject. He had worked through some of the contradictions as a result of his focus and concentration by virtue of his work.

The use of the method was valuable in enabling Arthur to express deeply held feelings about his upbringing and the countryside where he grew up. It also enabled him to acknowledge complexities and contradictions and not to seek false resolutions of difficulties.

Arthur was an example of a participant whose close relationship with his environmental mother had had a profound formative influence on his subsequent interest in the environment and his profession as an environmental journalist, linked with an attachment to the particular rural environment where he grew up.

Denial

Negation

The use of the method enabled Francis to bring out some of his contradictory behaviour, that is, his uncommitted environmental position as long as it did not cost him anything. Holly was able to expose her feelings that she flew too much, because she was spoiled and had the money to do it. She could also describe her resistance to what she described as ‘doom and gloom predictions’, while admitting that there was probably truth in them.

The method enabled Trevor to manifest his disregard for the consequences of climate change in expressing his scepticism about man-made climate change, his view of climate activists as terrorists in by-passing the law, and the narrative of his family’s traumas on both his father’s and his mother’s sides of the family which could be seen as explaining his position.

It also brought out my difficulty in going beyond Benjamin’s neutral approach, which might have been less obvious with another methodology. I invited him to talk to me about his development and his thoughts and feelings about climate change, and he responded by giving me a full account of his
professional development with very little account of how he was personally involved. He did describe starting in a mediocre inner city school and finding his way to Oxford, and his self confidence in doing so, but with no overt pride in the unusual nature of this achievement. He also described how his grandfather refused to allow his father to go to school and his father’s struggle to get educated in neutral and unemotional terms. His only overt expression of strong feeling was his excitement about China’s rapid development, lifting people out of poverty.

Disavowal

The method contributed to Francis’s ability to reveal his disregard of the furious debate taking place in the USA about climate change, and of the consequences of frequent flying for the environment. It also brought out the contradictions in Victor’s describing his choosing not to think about the consequences of flying, and Mary’s being able to forget the highly visible atmospheric pollution when viewed from the hills above Los Angeles, and her resistance to some facts of geology, expressed in her saying that it hurt her head.

Responses to Climate Change activism

The method also brought out Pamela’s account of a boyfriend refusing to fly home from Georgia, as potentially crazy, David’s description of pressure groups as operating via hysteria, leading to woolly thinking, Edward’s passionately felt reaction to climate activists as hating the human race and wanting it to be punished, Gloria not wanting to lecture her friends, and Holly’s admiration for and reservations about her environmentalist sister-in-law and her husband.

Powerful emotions and conflicts in participants’ communities of identity, and the role of the mother

I have illustrated above how Gloria and Holly had clear implicit contradictions between the different interpretive communities they were influenced by, and interestingly neither were strongly influenced by their mothers. With Edward there was also a clear implicit contradiction between the communities of identity he could be seen as belonging to, but he ruled out any discussion of his earlier family life so he gave no clue as to whether his mother had been influential in any way. Simon was an example of a non-environmentally minded participant who had been strongly favourably influenced by an active and involved mother who had had no environmental interest.
Victor illustrated the position of a participant with contradictory communities of identity, with no suggestion that this mother had influenced him either towards or away from environmental interests, while Francis was close to a non-environmentally oriented mother. Rosemary and Arthur were examples of environmentally oriented participants with a strong attachment to the rural environment where they had been brought up, who had been strongly influenced by mothers with strong environmental interests. Rosemary additionally illustrated another kind of conflict about two strongly felt attachments to conflicting communities of identity.

Albert was another example of a participant with a strong core identity and hence a community of identity as a scientist, completely contrasting with his opposing community of identity associated with his fascination with disaster scenarios. His Jewish mother died when he was aged ten, and he was not conscious of her influence over him, other than her having him brought up as a Jew. Hypothetically his preoccupation with disaster scenarios might have stemmed from the disaster of her death while he was still a child.

Two important patterns are identifiable in these findings, first that some people whose mothers have not apparently been influential can be quite unresolved over issues, like Gloria and Holly. Secondly, participants like Rosemary and Arthur represent a pattern of environmental mothers influencing them towards environmentalism; equally participants like Simon whose non-environmental mother was a strong positive influence, were left with no interest in the environment.

Complexity and Complexity theory

The complexity of the findings of this thesis has led me to reconsider the relevance of Complexity theory to the data. It is relevant to the findings of this thesis, explicitly, as regards the complexity of the participants’ responses to climate change, and implicitly, as regards the complexity of the inter-relationship between the three ecologies of mind, society and the natural world, each of them highly complex, and the argument for the presence of mind in all kinds of natural and social systems. These relationships are referred to in outline in Chapter 3 (Bateson 2000, Guattari 2008, Dodds 2011). As illustrated in that chapter, the principles of self organisation, and of how self regulation via negative feedback can be overruled by positive and self-amplifying feedback, can apply to human behaviour, developments in the social world and in the natural world (Kolbert 2014, Catton 1980). As systems develop and become more complex, properties emerge that do not exist at less complex levels (Capra 1996).

Victor, referred to above in the section entitled ‘A psycho-social approach, communities of identity, and the roles of mothers: Passivity’, where I have attempted a psycho-social analysis, can illustrate the
applicability of Complexity theory. Victor manifested considerable caution in his account of various aspects of his life, as in his doubts about being aware of how left wing he really was, his mixed feelings in relation to flying and consumerism generally, and his willingness to leave important decisions to his wife. This reluctance to commit himself could be seen as the incomplete operation of a self-organising principle of knowing what was really important to him, with the principle of accepting his wife’s lead as his primary organising principle.

It could equally be seen as the operation of a self regulating principle, protecting him from excess. His inclination to await a social or political movement that would bring about change could be an example of a quest for a self-organising group that he could be part of. These examples illustrate the interaction between the ecologies of his mind and his social worlds. His feelings about camping, slowing down on holiday and being in touch with sunsets, sunrises and the natural world, and his awareness of weather from an early age, its relevance to his surfing and his encounters with dolphins, illustrate his awareness of the ecology of natural world and how this inter-relates with the ecology of his mind and his social world. Complexity theory can thus enrich a psychological and a psycho-social analysis of the findings of this thesis.

As illustrated above, Holly, in the sub-section entitled ‘Open contradictions’, manifested complexity in her partly conscious, partly unconscious contradictory positions over environmental values yet flying frequently and heli-skiing. In her description of the inevitability of her entering a teaching career, there was a sense of a self-organisation emerging from a number of factors including her personality, her position in the family, her own school experience and her fluency in French. The same sense of something self-organising could be said to apply to her position about recycling, that it just makes complete sense, implying something obvious and self-evident.

Her enthusiasm for walking in the country, and for taking ‘hag-stones’ from the beach in Suffolk, and conkers, into the school where she was a volunteer, her attempts to bring in environmentally friendly elements into the new school buildings, and her preference for walking not driving wherever possible, display her integrating the ecology of the natural world and that of her personal and social worlds. However her attachment to flying and disregard for its ecological consequences showed where her integration of the ecology of the natural world and of her social world broke down.

Her enthusiasm for flying and heli-skiing could be thought of as a failure of self regulation, overwhelmed by the self-reinforcement of the pleasure and excitement of frequent flying and heli-skiing.

Considering Complexity theory can contribute to a deeper understanding of participants’ data from interviews.
Recent psychoanalytic thinking about climate change

This chapter offers the opportunity to consider chapters in the recently published collection of psychoanalytic papers about climate change, ‘Engaging with Climate Change’ (Weintrobe ed. 2013), part of a series of texts associated with the Institute of Psychoanalysis, and thus written specifically from the psychoanalytic side of a psycho-social perspective. However in including questions of culture, they can be seen as relevant to a psycho-social analysis. Weintrobe (40), in a chapter on anxiety, saw denial as embedded in an internalised arrogant social group culture threatening exclusion if challenged, similar to Rosenfeld’s conception of the individual being psychically controlled by a mafia gang. She (44) saw our society as attempting to deal with forms of anxiety about climate change by a culture of disavowal. In writing about loving and carting feelings about nature, she (207) argued that our sense of entitlement, based on a sense of superiority to other life forms, is embedded within our culture. Hoggett (2013: 58) identified perverse element in cultures of Western societies. He (59) saw a perverse collusion both internally and in the social world, but also between internal and external forces, and located the psychology of climate change denial in a cultural context.

Both Weintrobe and Hoggett, whose perspectives I share, expressed a moral perspective and were writing from a climate change activist position, which could fairly be identified as egalitarian, following cultural theory. I have explored some of the complexities of the concept of denial above. Haidt and some cultural theorists might claim that, while Weintrobe’s and Hoggett’s subjective values were founded in the values of their interpretive community, climate change resisters too base their positions on the values of their particular interpretive community. I hope that this thesis has attempted to identify ways that my participants were influenced by the interpretive communities to which they consciously or unconsciously belonged in establishing their moral perspectives on climate change.

I have discussed questions of complexity in my participants’ complex and contradictory feelings and views about climate change above, and Weintrobe, Lertzman and Hoggett all confirmed my findings. Weintrobe (2013), writing about the love of nature, drew attention to ambivalent feelings about nature, proposing that this ambivalence can lead to a deeper love of nature. Lertzman (2013: 120), in a chapter questioning the conception of environmental apathy, argued that psychoanalytic concepts like ambivalence, contradiction and conflict can contribute to understanding anxieties about giving up environmentally harmful activities while wanting to act to avoid environmental damage. Therefore (130) if humans are conflicted and ambivalent but also concerned and creative, environmental ‘apathy’ can be seen as expressing complex conflicting emotions. And Hoggett, writing from a socio-political perspective, stressed (57) the need for a complex understanding of the human mind. In considering the relevance of their conclusions about complexity to this thesis, Weintrobe (205, 208)
thought that the human tendency to split superior and inferior and to identify with the superior are are integral to our psychic lives, requiring psychic work to repair this split. I hope I have succeeded in illustrating how my participants were at various stages in this process of repair. Lertzman (130), concerned about transmitting environmental issues harmfully, sought an approach that both acknowledged and offset anxiety, guilt and ambivalence, while Hoggett (68) sought direct state intervention in order to deal with climate change. However questions of communicating environmental issues or of governmental intervention are beyond the scope of this thesis.

Weintrobre (43) identified attitudes of entitlement and suggested that we would fight hard to avoid giving up our unsustainable lifestyles; and Hoggett (58) in describing corporate perverse structure identified attitudes similar to entitlement. My material illustrates the complexity of how entitled feelings can co-exist with feeling more concerned about environmental issues.

I have emphasised the importance of place as influencing participants’ attitudes towards environmental issues. Weintrobre (203) described unconscious internal landscapes as imaginary places in which we have various kinds of relationships. In her mind however, these internal landscapes are not strongly associated with outer world places. However Lertzman’s (129) research was entirely based within a defined geographical space, and she drew on Guattari’s three ecologies in drawing together community identity and specific individual feelings and views. She thus confirmed my finding of the importance of place for some participants, as well as the importance of Guattari’s three ecologies.

**Summing up**

In this thesis I have demonstrated how, beneath the complexity of different theories about and denial of climate change, there are common themes that unite psychological, sociological and cultural theories. A dynamic psychoanalytic understanding of participants’ internal psychology is similar to the dynamics of affiliation to differing cultural and interpretive communities. These common themes emerge clearly in relation to an overlap between psychoanalytic and sociological forms of denial. An example of this is how catastrophism can be seen as both psychological and sociological.

I have demonstrated how all participants manifested disavowal and negation in relation to mitigating climate change and environmental damage. I have shown how a participant’s family history and education, a rural or urban upbringing, an environmentally active mother, and an optimistic or pessimistic outlook are all associated with greater or lesser degrees of environmental consciousness. However both optimistic and pessimistic participants described being aware of environmental deterioration. There was a pattern of an ebb and flow with most participants of varying degrees of
taking responsibilities for their thoughts, feelings and actions, which could be seen as a fluctuation between depressive and paranoid-schizoid positions. These are described in Chapter 2, ‘Psychoanalytic concepts’.

All participants disparaged and dissociated themselves from environmentally committed people whom they saw as extreme, and avoided themselves being identified in that way. They mostly acknowledged unequivocally the environmental damage done by their flying and expressed guilt or regret about it. They described weighing up shopping decisions between what they saw as environmentally friendly and what they could afford. They had diverse positions over recycling, some seeing it as environmentally friendly, others as tokenistic action allowing people to continue acting anti-environmentally. All participants manifested complex thoughts and feelings, and greater or lesser degrees of internal conflict, concerning mitigating climate change and environmental damage.

In Chapter 9 I describe the complexity revealed in my interviews with my participants. Climate change is a highly complex problem and virtually all my participants expressed degrees of uncertainty and ambivalence about the subject particularly in relation to air travel, as discussed in Chapter 9, and in their disparaging their environmental activist friends or relations and those who felt more unequivocal than themselves. They evidenced denial of climate change and its consequences in many different, interrelated forms. Thus, for instance, both poverty and wealth could be advanced as explanations for non-environmental behaviour. Their multiple and contradictory positions confirm O’Riordan and Jordan’s (1999) finding that cultural theory can express the way that we are all a mix of differing values and beliefs to varying degrees and in different combinations (see Chapter 3).

The degree to which participants felt able to take responsibility for their part in climate change varied, dependent partly on how active or helpless they felt temperamentally. I have noted above how willingness to be active was associated with a rural childhood and a strong maternal influence, and how an urban upbringing could often be associated with a lack of interest in climate change or the environment. As described in Chapter 9, sometimes the experience of a particular rural environment from childhood had been particularly influential. All this suggests an association between a rural childhood and maternal influence and a sense of maternal holding. There was no explicit awareness among my participants of any interrelationship of the ecologies of mind, of society and of the natural world. Generally, participants could think about their own patterns of thought and feeling, and about their social worlds, but there was little sense of these being related to the natural environment. It seemed that for my participants only a two-generational vision of the future of mankind was possible.
My sample was non-randomised and, considering differences between them by age and gender, produced few clear distinctions. This contrasts with Kratzer and Le Masson’s (2016) finding that ‘theories and interventions to address climate change that overlook women’s realities will not be able to fully capture how urban dwellers, particularly in slum areas, are affected by poverty and climate change’. The main difference was that those under 40, of both genders, were preponderantly climate concerned but with a sprinkling of sceptics, and of the over 40s, both male and female, about half were climate concerned with no sceptics among them but a number who seemed indifferent to climate issues.

It will be clear from the foregoing sections of this chapter that the interview data from the participants and the subsequent findings would not have been possible without a psycho-social approach and the modified form of Free Association Narrative Interview that I employed.

**Recommendations for practice**

I conducted this research in order to try to find out what underlying factors have influenced participants’ thoughts and feelings about climate change, with no secondary focus on potential outcomes. However, one message emerging from the research is that dividing society into believers and non-believers is simplistic and an example of the sort of paranoid–schizoid splitting that it is better to avoid. All members of society are implicated; all can contribute to mitigating climate change. Further, since there are strong cultural imperatives against discussing the question of climate change, everybody can contribute to overcoming this by being willing to open up and talk about the subject. This needs to include public information about the raw facts regarding climate change and its effects and implications, and future estimates of the consequences of ‘business as usual’. The findings of this research could contribute towards bringing greater understanding of the patterns and underlying causes of climate change denial, and make clearer the emotional barriers to developing and achieving, individually and collectively, a robust pro-environmental position. The uniqueness of the dilemmas faced by individual participants may speak to others with similar dilemmas, by “opening up” issues in a way that other research findings cannot, thus providing a unique potential for dissemination of concerns about climate change.

**Recommendations for further research**

Given an emerging pattern of a sense of empowerment, the environmental examples that some mothers provided, participants’ strong attachment to childhood surroundings and their
environmentalism, there is scope for research into links between maternal example and concern for the natural world, as well as into connections between attachment to childhood environments and environmental activism. The underlying connection between mothering and an unconscious relationship with ‘Mother Earth’ could be fruitfully explored. The association could also be investigated between a positive and optimistic frame of mind and feeling empowered to be active in terms of climate change, including what influences in early life have contributed to feeling so empowered.

Research could also consider how far urban schools can make up for town-bred children’s lack of exposure to nature by providing experience of the natural world. The association between traumatic experience and preoccupation with potential catastrophes also merits further investigation.

Climate change and the environment are ecological concerns, and there was little evidence of any awareness of the natural world and humanity’s place in it among my participants. It would be useful to research whether a lack of awareness of the principles of ecology is reflected throughout the population, and if so, the reasons for this. It could also be valuable to do follow-up interviews after a period of time to find out whether any of my participants had changed their views.
Appendices
Appendix I: Introduction to Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8

This appendix introduces the chief participants whose interview data I draw on in my four data analysis chapters: Pamela the theatre worker, Rosemary the environmental financier, Trevor the human rights worker, Victor the FE teacher, Arthur the environmental journalist, Benjamin the social enterprise consultant and Clive the FE teacher. I have not included the two whose data I explore in Chapter 5. Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8 describe the main themes arising from my interview data, and together form my analysis of the data from my interviews.

Chapter 5 compares and contrasts aspects of some common themes emerging from interviews with two particular participants, Francis and Holly. I consider the themes of climate change denial; parental relationships, country childhoods and environmentalism; and social and economic factors relating to climate change, drawing on extracts from my interviews with them.

Chapters 6, 7 and 8 explore these themes and others, drawing on interviews with the seven participants whom I introduce in this chapter as well as vignettes from interviews with other participants.

Pamela

I met Pamela at the small terraced house that she rents in south London. What she told me about herself and the way she told me was very moving. She was easy to interview and I found that we were like-minded in a number of ways. I am aware that this suggests a mutual positive transference and counter-transference, but I do not think this had any adverse effect. I was impressed by the maturity and insight into herself she had apparently developed, coming from a family of origin with great difficulties.

Main themes, narratives and process

Pamela avowed an environmental approach that dated back to her student days, and several times emphasised the merit of individual pro-environmental action. This connected her with her upbringing by her grandparents in the safety of a life in the deep countryside, their repairing and recycling things,
and the whole family’s commitment to the environment and a rural way of life. She acknowledged ways in which she found this difficult to live up to, especially as regards flying. She described her association with a man who had cycled round the world and who chooses not to fly, and touched on the difficulty of being seen as an extremist. She was ambivalent about evangelising about environmental values. This had led on to her own commitment to cycling and recycling.

She had been brought up mainly by her grandparents, after her mother’s death when she was aged 15 months. Her father’s psychological difficulties had a damaging effect on her childhood, which she had to deal with in herself; she felt it had made her a stronger person. She felt a deep connection with her grandmother, who was still alive, and who played a key role in her upbringing. She explored the need for compassion over mental illness, arising from her experience of her father’s mental illness, which she had developed into a theme of ethical concern for developing countries.

Her environmentalism was partly expressed in her cycling and her residual anger about car drivers who occupy road space and ignore cyclists. She affirmed the need for governmental support for environmentally friendly action. She explored her values and ethical beliefs, not avoiding the difficulties of conflicts between ethical and economic choices, and admitted her guilt about flying to places abroad for a weekend.

She described having questioned whether God loved her as a child, but now as an adult felt lovingly watched over. Her self-doubt might connect with her present self-critical standpoint and strict ethics, and she frequently described herself as ‘hypocritical’.

My question about her having children in the future led to her describing her recent discovery that she had been unable to think of her own life beyond the age at which her mother died, and therefore to conceive of having children, in spite of having maternal instincts. She was in tears as she described her mother’s premature death and her consequent unconscious reluctance to put a child of hers through the loss of a mother.

Rosemary

I met Rosemary at a large impersonal central London hotel. It was initially difficult to find a quiet spot to talk. In an email she had mentioned that, ‘Nurses have said I should take it easy this side of the festive season’, which alerted me that she had a health problem. She was open and talked freely about her mixed feelings of excitement about her career, and the major setbacks in her family and emotional life that had culminated in her developing a cancer that needed extensive treatment.
Main themes, narratives and process

There was a strongly emotional quality to Rosemary’s probably idealised account of herself and her life, her idyllic childhood, her enthusiasm for her environmental studies, her involvement in environmental politics and finance and her enthusiasm for developing an ecological investment fund. A major theme was the impact of having been brought up in the country with horses and other animals, where she was free to roam, under the strong influence of her active mother who encouraged her interest in the outdoors and passed on her own enthusiasm for politics.

A second theme was her disregard for the implications of major setbacks in her life: her younger brother’s death, her parents’ separation and the loss of a family home, her marriage to a man who had admitted his gay inclinations but turned out to be truly gay and then died of AIDS, and her distress about a son with considerable emotional difficulties. All of that contributed in various ways to her experience of depression.

Another theme was her zest for her degree in environmental economics, which led on to her youthful involvement in environmental law, politics and thence to socially responsible and ecological investment, and innovative ways of evaluating corporate ecological footprints. This led in turn to her interest in and commitment to Asia and an Asia Pacific ecological fund. She described her frustration with limited attitudes to ecological funding in the UK. These accounts proceeded from one to another with little prompting from me.

In marked contrast, in the second half of the interview she described the complexities of her health and her personal and emotional life, described above. Her son’s breakdown together with her developing cancer was the final issue that led to her abandoning her career in ecological finance. All these setbacks had led to an extensive and painful re-evaluation of her life and a different sense of her responsibilities.

A key theme throughout Rosemary’s narratives was her determination to take a positive attitude to whatever misfortunes hit her and to find what good can be gleaned from disasters. This included having to give up her career in East Asia in order to take care of her son who was having a breakdown, dealing with an employee who nearly wrecked her company, and dealing with her cancer.

The attack on the Twin Towers of the New York World Trade Center and then the financial crash of 2008 were turning points that, as she sees it, massively set back environmental politics, and together gravely set her back personally.
She also described the multiple responsibilities of her work, her son, his inheritance of a large country house, her illness and her second husband. She implicitly described a painful voyage of self-discovery and self-realisation, and self-questioningly wondered whether her commitment to her son masked a fear about not succeeding in East Asia.

**Trevor**

I met Trevor at his ex-council flat in East London, crowded with bikes in the small entrance space, which gave the impression of a male environment. He was Spanish but had lived in London for a number of years. He was warm, open, friendly and relaxed, a straightforward and easy person to interview. I was impressed by the family difficulties that he had come through and his commitment to what he wanted to achieve.

**Main themes, narratives and process**

Trevor started by declaring his intention to think about how climate change has impacted on him. He then described his secondary and higher education, including his work for a local paper while at school, the development of his interest in human rights and journalism, and his career so far including his work for various NGOs. This connected with his parents’ interest in promoting reconciliation after the Franco years and the left-wing touring political theatre company they were involved with. This may have been connected with the traumas of his father’s side of the family during the Spanish Civil War. This led him on to thinking about the comparison between his father’s and his mother’s characters, his father’s stroke and his mother’s alcoholism, both of which had shaped him in different ways.

A key theme throughout the interview was his reflections about global warming and climate change: it was not an issue during his education; his instincts were more towards politics and human rights than the environment; he had always been concerned with recycling; Greenpeace has been compared to a terrorist organisation; and he was anyway sceptical about man-made global warming.

The experience of his family of origin was a second theme. On his father’s side, his great-grandfather was killed in the Spanish Civil War, and his grandfather was traumatised by his experiences in the war. On his mother’s side, when his grandmother died, his grandfather killed himself; this left Trevor’s mother feeling guilty and led to her subsequent alcoholism, which made a huge impact on him. His sister was always chronically depressed with acute social difficulties. He went on to describe his traumatic confrontation with his mother – which led to her giving up alcohol – and his parents’
divorce and his father’s stroke at a young age, which brought his parents together again, though on different terms.

Trevor’s own professional development and his ultimate aim of becoming a journalist was the third theme. He wrote articles for his local newspaper when at school, but he has worked in various human rights organisations along the way.

Another theme was his view of himself as moderate in all things, taking after his father, who, although an anarchist, was also moderate and a believer in observing the law. His implicit narrative was of considerable struggles in which his courage, outgoing nature and determination showed through.

The economic and cultural troubles of the people of the Western Sahara, was a strong theme. Another concerned his dislike of his small home town in Andalusia and his lack of relation to the surrounding countryside and environment, but he had kept his links with many school-friends. He implied that he was a leader among them.

**Victor**

Victor came to meet me in my consulting room, which seemed not to have affected our meeting. He was approachable and friendly, but somewhat guarded and cautious, and by his own description rather passive. I felt that I had to prompt him quite a bit, but I think the interview was productive and that my promptings were not detrimental.

**Main themes, narratives and process**

Victor’s not taking the lead was a recurring theme.

His enthusiasm about design and environment was a key theme (stemming from his design training) – including about the merits of new design and technology, especially hybrid cars and the new London bus. He had a narrative of technology as having been devoted to the thrill of exploration, compared to the more prosaic contemporary preoccupation with communications technology. He advocated designing things from organic materials built to last, the merits of British design and the advantages of government backing for design. In the 1950s government and governmental support, especially for architecture and on infrastructure, was valued more. He questioned restrictions on development, compared to how it is in the Middle East and India, and how adaptable and creative people there had to be to survive.
He described moving into teaching; he was glad of his work because it was a good thing to be doing. Without a strong sense of vocation, it had proved to be very satisfying. He wouldn't have been well suited to a job in the City, and thought he might be further to the left than was prudent.

He explained his long-term interest in weather, how he experienced the environment, particularly weather, through surfing, and how climate change affects surfing. He enjoyed camping, the outdoors, the simplicity of camping, and the risks of surfing. They highlighted how consumerist we are and made us aware of the natural world. He avoided thinking about climate change, although he knew it was happening – he thought society generally avoided discussing climate change, and wondered if environmentalism only existed within a middle-class bubble. He was nostalgic for an earlier generation’s more sustainable lifestyle and admired his parents-in-law for their values, way of life and self-sufficiency.

Victor was cynical and uninterested in politics, and despised careerist politicians, but regretted that more wasn’t done to bring people together creatively. The short-term approach of parliamentary democracy militated against developing an environmental political movement. He was proud that he did not spend a lot on clothes and gadgets. He noted that the government encouraging people to spend, in order to build up the economy, went against his values of not getting into debt. He sidestepped my question about how empowered he felt by talking about the Church’s attitude to environmental questions, but he did feel disempowered by banks and corporations.

He saw that technology can cut people, especially young people, off from one another. He contrasted the excitement of space and supersonic travel when he was young with young people’s preoccupation with the advances of technology today. He was brought up near Heathrow, where many people worked, so he was aware of Concorde and its environmental impact, and he was interested in the environmental impact of a third runway or the potential Thames airport.

Victor was impressed by friends who were consuming less, and inspired by the example of his wife’s parents’ rejection of present-day consumerist values. He noted how an earlier generation lived a more sustainable life compared with contemporary throw-away values, but he believed that values can change. He described two income tiers: below a certain point, life is very difficult; above that point, people want to keep up with what other people are doing. He described how the ideal of lower consumption runs contrary to consumerism, including the consumption of flying and travelling, and he hoped that changes in consumption would ‘just happen’ – but he later had a narrative of his and his wife’s pleasure in flying to places, and how hard it was to give this up.
He valued the atmosphere of free yet rigorous discussion within his family – and his father’s and grandfather’s politics, particularly his grandfather’s socialism. He particularly admired his grandfather, both for his intelligence and for his political principles. He compared his father and his interest in how things work, with his own generation, brought up to accept technology without understanding how it works.

Arthur

Arthur and I met in a noisy and crowded café. He was friendly, warm and confident and responded extensively and thoughtfully to my questions. As a journalist he was thoughtful about my position in interviewing him. I felt that we were in close rapport.

Main themes, narratives and process

Arthur began by outlining his view of his development as an environmental journalist. He described the effect of growing up in a country area and the importance of his relationship with his family’s dog, and the effect of his mother’s interest in the natural world. His mother’s friend took them to unusual places in order to see wild life.

This was linked with the need to educate people about the environment, based on how he has been influenced by the way he was brought up. He developed from enjoying reading to realising that he could combine journalism with his interest in the environment. He became interested in climate change because it impacts on the wildlife of his native environment: he described seeing the countryside near his home being gradually eaten away by housing development, which led him to feel responsible for advancing an environmental agenda.

Arthur described how journalists are reluctant to write about climate change because it is divisive; he argued that the media should not be blamed for the public lack of interest in environmental matters, given that they are ultimately there to make money. He maintained that there is more environmental journalism than there was before – but online, not in the mainstream media. He felt hopeful about the interest of younger journalists in environmental issues and about young people generally. He saw education as having an important part to play in increasing public awareness of climate change.

He thought that the government resisted change, particularly as regards supporting the development of the ‘green economy’, and especially in the current poor economic climate. In his view the best way to
involve people in environmental action was to make it attractive financially, but at present fossil fuels were more economic than renewable energy sources.

Arthur went on to explore the contradictions of his liking cars and Top Gear as well as the natural world, and between being an environmental journalist and having to fly to do his work. He did not anticipate any reduction in air travel, given the cheap air flights all over Europe and the emerging Indian and Chinese economies.

He described how hard it sometimes was to be optimistic in the face of things deteriorating environmentally, but how necessary it was in order to keep going. He said several times that he didn’t know the answer to a particular problem. He saw young people as intelligent and willing to take on the need for action on climate change, and generally hopeful about the future. He went on to talk about working on his own and how in many ways it suited him.

He described how his circle of friends largely felt as he did over environmental issues, and how important it was for people to feel that they could contribute even if it was only by recycling.

**Benjamin**

I met Benjamin in a public arena in his office. Other people were present, but at a distance. This interview had a formal and neutral quality, perhaps influenced by its semi-public setting, and his thoughts and feelings were moderate and impersonal. He positioned himself as an idealistic business manager and consultant. I found it difficult through the interview to engage closely with him, or to reach a more personal side to his life and development. I found out very little about his relationships with his immediate family or his friends or any intimate relationship. I did not reach an understanding of his move towards poverty alleviation.

I was perplexed by him, and he challenged some of my stereotypes. He came from a West African family, but seemed to have little sense of affiliation to West Africa. He grew up in a lower-middle-class family in Peckham, but played down the achievement of having found his way to Oxford and thence into corporate law. He seems to have been self-confident from an early age – he was encouraged to make decisions about his education – but he did not seem arrogant. If he had encountered racial prejudice it did not emerge in our interview.

He appeared to be trapped in corporate language and possibly a corporate way of thinking that seemed strongly at variance with his independence of mind. I wonder whether the way I challenged him about
sustainability and social enterprise contributed to this atmosphere of caution; he may have seen me as taking a challenging environmental position.

Main themes, narratives and process

The first part of the interview consisted of a ten minute–long passage in which Benjamin told me about the development of his business career and his current activities, without any intervention by me. He placed his own concerns for poverty alleviation and enhancing people’s independence at the centre of his value structures, and returned to these repeatedly. He described his spell in the world of corporate law, where companies’ main concerns were to provide profit for shareholders, and how separate this was from his concerns for poverty alleviation. He saw disadvantages in both profit-making and non-profit-making organisations – which in his eyes make decisions ineffectively – and favoured the social enterprise model, committed to more than profit, with socially responsible and sustainable aims. He saw companies on a continuum of involvement in social enterprise, from a PR exercise to non-profitable, genuinely environmental activities, which are seen as good marketing.

Then he moved backwards to describe his own development. He implicitly gave an account of a typical immigrant narrative where able parents had to take relatively low-paid and menial work, so that the second generation was thereby enabled and motivated to high achievement. This section of the interview implicitly concerned the importance of education. He described neutrally his grandfather’s attitude of seeing education as unnecessary for Benjamin’s father, and his father’s struggle to get educated. He implicitly contrasted his grandfather’s attitude with his father’s enthusiasm for education, and the consequent benefit to Benjamin himself. He perhaps accepted but disagreed with his grandfather’s reasons, given his own good experience of education and the opportunities it had given him.

He saw his parents as having encouraged him to make his own decisions. He described his education while growing up in Peckham as a member of an ethnic minority, and his move at sixth-form level to a more academic school. He then implicitly described the path of an academic high-flier, though not defining himself in those terms; he got to Oxford and while there, worked at the Bank of England. He was modest about his academic ability and career achievements so far, as well as his idealistic commitment to poverty alleviation. An impression of his altruism was reinforced by his pro bono work while working in corporate law. After Oxford he trained as a solicitor and worked in corporate law, but became disappointed with the limitations of what companies expect from corporate lawyers. Neither of us brought up the question of any discrimination that he may have suffered as a member of an ethnic minority.
An underlying narrative emerged of an urban, economist’s mindset focused on production, and on maximising growth and profitability as the route to poverty alleviation by extending the choices and resilience of people in the developing world – helping people to help themselves. He saw a conflict between polluting forms of economic development and the aim of enabling market processes in the interests of reducing poverty. Carbon credits may have the effect of reducing demand and limiting poverty reduction. He thought about his company’s customers in general terms, systematically, which suggested a degree of personal distance from them and an exclusively economic approach. However, he implied that they will have a whole range of problems of which climate change is one of the least prominent.

Benjamin questioned the effectiveness of action on climate change (he thought we may have gone past certain points already) and the benefit of environmental protection and limiting pollution (for example in China). He dismissed the impact of climate change on future generations. He also questioned the mechanism of carbon credits, since it would limit access to power supplies for poorer people. He considered the issue of damage to future generations, applying an economic analysis. He only once hinted at a redistributive view of making people better off by giving them better access to resources.

He said that he had little connection with the natural world, either in this country or in West Africa. The environment was nebulous to him, and he dismissed concerns about climate change and the environment. He revealed a degree of contradiction between saying first that mitigation was ineffective, and second that it may already be too late to prevent consequences. He did not have a strong connection with West Africa, and he would feel out of place there. Besides, he saw there being limited opportunities for himself. He explicitly thought of the environment in a restricted way as associated with urban parkland.

He saw flying purely in terms of the advantages of people becoming more aware of other peoples’ cultures. In his social world his friends would largely share his economic perspective.

Clive

I met Clive in the living room of his first-floor flat. I had gathered that his wife was suffering a medical problem as he had cancelled an earlier appointment, saying that she was undergoing physiotherapy so her mobility was impaired. I was ushered into the room where his wife was sitting with her back to us, supported by pillows and cushions, and apparently reading a book from an easel. He didn’t introduce me to her and she was silent throughout the whole hour that I was there, though she left and returned once. I did wonder what effect her presence and her overhearing our
conversation was having on either or both of us. He seemed diffident and mostly made comparatively short statements about himself followed by appreciable silences, causing me to feel a pressure to prompt him with further questions. All this may have contributed to my unease in talking to him.

Main themes, narratives and process

As described above, this interview did not flow or take its own natural course. I did find off-putting the presence of another, silent, person in the room whom I was not introduced to. I could not tell what she felt about my presence, but looking back I may have subconsciously wondered whether she resented it. Probably her presence contributed to the inhibited atmosphere of the interview, at least on my part and perhaps on his. I did not ask Clive about his wife’s presence and he did not explain it. Nor did I question his lack of practical involvement in the issues that concerned him. I felt he was unforthcoming and, apart from a couple of quite extended statements at the start of the interview, he was making quite short remarks with disconcertingly long pauses or silences. In my counter-transference I felt insecure as an interviewer, so I found myself departing from a psycho-social model of enabling the participant to develop his or her own narrative, and resorting to a more question-and-answer approach.

Later in the interview he described how his father did not talk about his beliefs and Clive did not know what his father believed in, so it was hard to know what he was thinking. Looking back, Clive’s feeling about his father may have been echoed in my counter-transference to him. I thought he might be shy. He described being enthusiastic about teaching, but also having been unsure of himself in understanding and relating to people.

A main theme was his relationship with his mother, who was left-wing and active in many causes, including environmental ones, which gave him an interest in news and politics. He seemed to follow these interests in a theoretical way, unlike his mother’s practical approach, by newspaper reading. Consequently he had moved away from his childhood optimism towards a more worried environmental pessimism about the future.

There was an underlying narrative of the damaging effect of the break-up of his parents’ marriage and his consequent divided life when he was seven, spending the week with his father in suburban London and weekends with his mother in Devon. This connected with his diffidence about understanding and relating to people. This in turn might have derived from his father’s uncommunicativeness, his sisters’ meteoric academic careers and success and perhaps not a close relationship with either sister, and his tendency towards anxiety.
Responding to my question, Clive then talked about the development of his enthusiasm for teaching, arising from his experience of his own education, which he saw as an interest in what makes people tick. He went on to describe his excitement about literature and theatre and the way that it can increase understanding of many fields but – particularly as an insecure person – how he felt it helped him to understand other people and his relationship with them.

Then he talked about his interest in politics and news generally; he viewed the world through the spectrum of newspapers, at one remove. He was particularly concerned about the discussion that is missing in the media about climate change; he felt frustrated and futile about the general disregard for the effects of global warming, and the current dedication to individualism and ‘business as usual’. He went on to talk about the media’s distortion of the 95% scientific consensus into a debate between equal and opposite sides, and he saw a widespread feeling of powerlessness among the public. He described the difficulty of taking self-depriving action in the face of huge uncertainties about their long-term benefit.

This led on to thoughts about science and its importance, how uninteresting it seemed at school, and how he now admired the achievements of science. He went on to deplore the current attachment to consumerism and disregard for its environmental consequences. He described the way that literature had opened things up for him by helping him to see how other people felt. He then made a connection between climate change and thoughts of death. He had a memory of a family of foxes living in his suburban garden and of once seeing two badgers crossing the garden. He explained how going to Devon was an escape from the stress of his daily life. He finished with a feeling that it was hard to feel that things could be changed by protesting.

Summary

I selected these participants for closer consideration because their comments were the most striking and illustrative of the matters I have focused on. Reflecting about my choice, I notice that they are all in the younger age group except Rosemary, who was probably in her early fifties. Five were people that I felt a rapport with, while the interviews with the other two were more difficult and disconcerting. There are more men than women; two out of the seven were explicitly sceptical and one was dubious about taking action on climate change. Taken all together – combined with Francis and Holly, whom I describe in Chapter 5 – they form a good cross-section of my participants.
Appendix II: Climate change information and other resources accessible on the internet

This United States National Research Council video provides a concise account of carbon emissions, their effect and their implications:

[Accessed 23 March 2016]

Skeptical Science is a website devoted to raising awareness of climate change and rebutting misinformation about the subject:

http://www.skepticalscience.com/
[Accessed 23 March 2016]

This Youtube clip entertainingly sums up the 2015 Paris agreement:

Awesome/Awful Paris Climate Deal
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2xqQkU_19cg
[Accessed 2 February 2016]

This animation represents increases in global temperature over 166 years, and shows how the rate of temperature increase is itself speeding up:

[Accessed 10 May 2016]

This Youtube clip contains the whole of the show *Beyond the Fringe*, including the sketch ‘The End of the World’ referred to in Chapter 1:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KUd1OxPbKk4
[Accessed 16 May 2016]
Appendix III: Myths of Nature

Holling (1986) found different assumptions about nature underlay the spruce-budworm control strategies practised by Canadian foresters, which he represented in four diagrams of a ball in a landscape, calling them myths of nature:

In the *benign* nature myth, the natural environment is favourable toward humankind, in global equilibrium, and will re-establish its natural order.

The *ephemeral* nature myth sees nature as in precarious balance, where disturbance may trigger a collapse.

The *perverse/tolerant* myth acknowledges uncertainty but assumes that management can limit disorder and maintain equilibrium.

Appendix IV: Informed Consent Notice

University of the West of England
Faculty of Health and Life Sciences: Centre for Psycho-Social Studies

Informed Consent Notice

Responses to Climate Change and the Natural World:
a Psycho-Social Study

I am hoping that you will agree to talk to me as a participant in this research project. It is important for you to have all the information you need, so may I ask you to consider this notice and let me know if there is anything further that you would like to know before you decide whether to take part. Many thanks for considering this.

Purpose of this study

The purpose of this study is to learn more about psychological factors underlying concern, scepticism and indifference about climate change and the natural world. I am conducting it as an unfunded part-time PhD project with the University of the West of England under the supervision of Professor Paul Hoggett, using in-depth interviews with a range of participants.

What I shall be asking you to do

I will invite you to take part in an interview, lasting between one and an one and a half hours, in which I will ask you to talk to me about your feelings and views about climate change and the natural world; and what has influenced you, such as your family background, education, immediate family, values, work and career, and professional, organisational and social circles. I will record the interviews so that there is an accurate record, and will give you an opportunity to check transcripts for accuracy.
If you do decide to take part, I hope that you will enjoy and value our meeting; everybody I have talked with so far has done so. You would of course be completely free to withdraw from the interview at any time if you felt uneasy or unhappy about any aspect of it.

Confidentiality

All material from interviews will be kept confidential, and transcripts will be rendered anonymous. It will not be possible to identify any individual from any publication of this research. Transcripts and data will be stored securely.

Results of the study

We hope that this research will contribute to understanding about factors shaping concern, scepticism and indifference about climate change and the natural world. It will be part of a PhD thesis, and it may possibly form part of other publications or presentations. I will be glad to report any findings to you and involve you in any other appropriate way.

Your agreement

If after reading this you would be willing to take part, will you please complete the attached consent form and return it to me. My particulars are:

  Robert Tollemache  
  27 Aubert Park, London N5 1TP  
  020 7226 6588  
  rtollemache@yahoo.co.uk

My supervisor is:

  Professor Paul Hoggett, The Centre for Psycho-Social Studies,  
  Faculty of Health and Life Sciences, University of the West of England,  
  Glenside Campus, Blackberry Hill, Bristol BS16 1DD

I am grateful to you for considering whether to take part in this research. 27.10.12.
Appendix V: Informed Consent Form

University of the West of England
Faculty of Health and Life Sciences: Centre for Psycho-Social Studies

PhD

Responses to Climate Change and the Natural world:
a Psycho-Social Study

Consent Form

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the Information sheet for this study, and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason.

3. I agree to take part in this study.

4. I agree to the interview being audio recorded.

5. I agree to the use of anonymised quotations in any publication or presentation.

Participant’s name  Signature  Date

Researcher’s name  Signature  Date
Appendix VI: Questionnaire

Narrative

I would like to get to know about your feelings and views about climate change from your own point of view. I want to invite you to tell me all about yourself and your life, and the way that your feelings and views about climate change have emerged, and are related to and grow out of your own history and development.

Values

1. How far do you think most of your family, friends and colleagues agree with the following propositions?

   1. We have a responsibility towards peoples of developing countries whose environments, economies and ways of life are and will be affected by climate change, to reduce the impact of on them.

   2. It is possible to develop an internationally fair global sustainable economic theory and practice not involving dependence on growth.

   3. We have a responsibility to pass on the planet in a similar or better condition than it was passed on to us, to our grandchildren and great grand children.

   4. A parent’s first responsibility is to provide a secure home life emotionally and materially for their children, and to provide materially for their future, given the uncertainties of the future.

   5. ‘The common’ describes resources like the atmosphere, the oceans, the untapped mineral resources of the earth, and the forests and polar areas from which we all benefit. It is essential to develop and take advantage of these resources and the only way to do this is through economic efficiency by means of the operation of market forces.

   6. Society has been democratised by making access to jobs, shopping, resources and travel widely available (‘universal’).

      1. This has been generally beneficial in our society.

      2. This has been an effective strategy to disguise gross differences in income and status.

   7. Demand must be created by the fostering of material aspiration by means of advertising, in order to provide full employment. The exact nature of what is produced is relatively less important; global economic and political stability depend on continuing economic growth.
8. Ultimately, power, authority, status and material success matter more than fairness and the protecting children, old people and poor people.

9. We are largely powerless to do much about environmental issues such as climate change which require governmental and international agreement.

10. Whatever we feel about CC, we have to face up to the realities of economics and to the potentially massively economically destructive implications of too ill thought out responses to the threat of CC.

2. How far do you yourself agree with the propositions above?

3. How aware are you of changes in our values and practices as a society over the 65 years since the end of the Second World War?
   a. All the developments in everyday life that involve the use of energy; Central heating, household appliances, individual transport, cheap clothing, supermarkets, international trade and goods transport, massive availability of international travel for business and holidays;

   b. Changes in values about material things, including built-in obsolescence, waste and the ‘throw-away society’.

   c. Our disregard for sources of raw materials needed for these developments.

   d. The social and environmental costs of the exploitation of raw materials.

**Interpersonal and cultural influences on attitudes to climate change**

4. What got you interested in climate change?

5. Do you find it difficult to reconcile your feelings and views about climate change and your way of life?

6. What would you say was the predominant network for you; family, friends and social network, colleagues?

7. Have your views about climate change been influenced by:
   1. the media?
   2. friends?
   3. your family?
   4. your profession or career?

8. Would you say that being part of a couple can act as a brake or amplifier of CC views and action?
9. Would you say that your views have influenced other people?

10. Are there differences between your beliefs about climate change and those of your family, friends and colleagues?
   1. Do you feel under pressure to conform?
   2. Do you feel pressure from anybody to change your views?
   3. Do you feel pressure to comply with particular behaviour regarding climate change?

11. Do you feel that having a position about CC is connected with adherence to or participation in a particular culture?

12. Would you say that you come from a settled, or a disrupted family culture, and has this contributed to your position about CC and generally on economic, social and ethical issues?

13. Do you think people’s attitudes to matters such as CC change according to the stage of life they find themselves at, and if so, in what way?

14. Do you think that income and class play a part in attitudes towards CC?
   1. access to land and air travel?
   2. family global dispersion making air travel seem indispensable?
   3. housing and domestic space heating?
   4. consumption of food and material goods?

15. There is a theory that the more you know about a problem like climate change, the more you are inclined to become more involved in action on that subject; how far would you agree?

16. How far do most of your family, friends and colleagues believe that climate change is happening?
   1. Do you believe it is happening?
   2. Are most your family, friends and colleagues aware of climate change?
   3. Are you aware of it?

17. How far do you agree with the following propositions?
   1. climate change activism is promoted by special interests
   2. climate change scepticism is promoted by special interests
   3. Many climate change activists are evangelical in their approach
   4. Many climate change sceptics are evangelical in their approach

18. Is it difficult to keep climate concern and climate zeal and evangelism separate and distinct in the public mind?
   1. How would you distinguish them in your mind?

The scientific basis of belief in climate change

19. What is your view of scientific modelling and prediction?
   1. How far can we base planning for the future on the sometimes opposed predictions of scientists?
   2. In your opinion are there problems with what is known as ‘the climate change scientific
20. What is your view of ‘risk’?
   1. What do you see as the overriding risks that we face as a species?
   2. Can anything effective be done about these risks?

21. Do most your family, friends and colleagues believe that climate change is man made?
   1. Do you believe it?

22. Are you reasonably aware of the findings of the UNIPCC reports?
   1. Do you broadly accept the findings of the UNIPCC reports?

23. How far do you believe it is possible to reduce the emissions of greenhouse gases (GHGs)
   enough to avoid catastrophic climate change?
   1. What do you believe can be done to achieve this?

2. Should UK government act to reduce GHG emissions?

3. Should the initiative come from members of the public?

4. Should the UK/EU take the lead, or wait for global agreement?

5. Can our economy afford the cost of measures to reduce GHGs?

6. Should the government discriminate against GHG intensive transport and in favour of low
   GHG emitting transport via taxes, subsidy or otherwise?

7. Can properly set up and administered market mechanisms achieve the necessary
   reductions in GHG emissions?

**The influence of the Media on opinion about climate change**

24. Thinking about the news media—national television news, the daily newspaper you are most
   familiar with, and news magazines—would you say the news media help society to solve its
   problems, OR do the news media get in the way of society solving its problems?

25. How much of the time do you think you can trust media organizations to report the news
   fairly?
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