

St. Stephen's College

To Be Alive in the World Right Now: Climate Grief in Young Climate  
Organizers

by

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fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF THEOLOGICAL STUDIES

© Gabrielle Gelderman, 2021  
Edmonton, Alberta

For my Grandpa Herman

(February 2, 1926 – January 6, 2021)

who loved without holding back, especially towards the end.

&

For all my comrades, near and far, but most of all

Cordelius, Mónica, Alyssa, Yara, Alison, Danielle, Carter, Juan and Laura.

## **Abstract**

The following study addresses the experience of climate grief in young organizers in Edmonton, Alberta / amiswaciwâskahikan, Treaty 6. Grounded in an art-based research methodology and using a theological lens, I examined the ways climate organizers give meaning to their grief and the ways shared forms of meaning-making can lead to healing. Informed by a narrative métissage model, I designed two workshops in which nine participants developed both personal and shared narratives about their grief. An analysis of the personal narratives revealed six emotional themes used to describe and make sense of grief: anger/bitterness, fear/anxiety, guilt/self-criticism, hopelessness/despair, resolve/determination, and sorrow/hurt. Additionally, an investigation into the group process showed that by sharing their narratives, participants were able to experience a meaningful and healing connection to themselves, one another, and/or something beyond the group. It was the experience of connecting to an entity or narrative which transcended the group that provided the most enduring form of meaning, helping participants feel more able to face the pain of future loss. A discussion of these findings concluded that having access to shared spaces of mourning and meaning-making is critical for climate organizers' healing. It was shown that without these spaces, participants were forced to cope with their grief individually, often using strategies like numbing, avoidance, and blame, all of which caused feelings of disconnection and distress.

Key words: climate grief, spiritual care, spirituality, climate organizing, grief and loss, mourning, narrative métissage, meaning-making

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Humbly, I also express gratitude for my teachers, living and passed, and the Treaty 6 land and North Saskatchewan River (kisiskāciwani-sīpiy), all of whom conspired to raise me. Finally, and with great love and solidarity, I thank my fellow organizers, for reminding me every day, in big and small ways, that a better world is possible.

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**A note for the reader:**

My intention has been to make this thesis as readable as possible, especially for organizers or anyone reading for personal rather than academic reasons. To this end, you will find fragments of my own poetry and personal narrative (the latter distinguished with black border) woven through the pages ahead. I hope they help capture some of the emotional weight and complexity of climate grief, places where academic language often falls short.

If you want to skim this document (and I suggest you do!), I recommend chapters 1, 4, and 5. If you're an organizer, you might also find pages 22-31 and some of the appendices interesting.





This thesis is about grief and loss and pain and deep woundedness. It is also about healing and liberation and deep belonging. Before this year, I had no idea how tightly interwoven these things were. I thought I could study climate grief as an isolated phenomenon; I would simply recruit some participants, ask them how they felt about the climate crisis, and end up with some nice concise findings on climate grief. This was not the case. About half way through, I learned that climate grief was like a thread, and pulling on it meant unravelling certain deep and wounded parts of ourselves, parts we might not have even known were there.

It finally made sense to me why so many of us avoid thinking about the climate crisis. I think on some unconscious level, most of us know that if we let it, climate grief, like all grief, will unravel us. It will kick our ego out of the driver's seat and bring us face to face with some of our deepest fears—fears of suffering, uncertainty, powerlessness, death, our fear that our lives will turn out to be meaningless. Understandably then, many of us work very hard to avoid thinking, talking, or reading too much about the climate crisis.

In this study though, I worked with people who had *chosen* to spend much of their free time engaging with climate justice issues. Having worked as a climate organizer myself, I knew the emotional and spiritual toll this work could take—I knew the way it caused these unconscious fears to rise to the surface and cast their shadow over everything; and, I knew just how scary it felt to stop moving long enough to let this shadow catch up with you. But, as a chaplain, I also had a deep trust in the profound healing and transformation that happens when we face the pain of loss head on. In the

pages that follow, I explore both these ideas, examining the tremendous pain of climate-related loss, while also looking at the ways that loss, by unravelling us and bringing us face to face with our own deep fears and deep wounds, is the very thing that opens these places up to healing.

I wrote this thesis with organizers in mind. If that is you, I hope you can see some of your own journey reflected in these pages. Even more so, I hope you see the ways your journey is woven into a much bigger story of love and loss and liberation, a story urging all of us to continue—continue fighting; continue loving; continue tugging on the well-worn threads of our own broken hearts, following them as they lead us back, again and again, to one another and to the world. Most of my poems are addressed to you.

## 1.1 Direction of the Weave

Climate grief is a relatively new concept to academia and there is no agreed upon definition of the term. Therefore, I developed my own working definition, based on my research and personal experience:

*Climate grief is a natural human response, conscious or unconscious, to the losses we experience and anticipate as a result of the climate crisis and the systems of oppression that cause it.*

Like all forms of grief, climate grief refers to our human response to loss (in this case, climate-related loss) and can include a wide range of emotions, anything from

anxiety and anger, to guilt and despair, to more positive emotions like gratitude and compassion. Approaching my research as a theology student meant that although I was interested in the human emotional response to climate change (a psychological area of focus), I was more interested in how these emotions related to *meaning*. This led to me to asking questions like: How does the climate crisis impact the ways we find our lives to be meaningful? How does our awareness of the climate crisis alter the beliefs and narratives that give our lives purpose? How can grieving together help restore forms of meaning fractured by climate-related loss?

Traditionally, the fields theology and spiritual care have used religion to answer these kinds of questions. However, since I wanted to conduct research with young climate organizers who I knew would be coming from a range of belief systems, I needed a method that was more spiritually inclusive. I decided to use personal narrative writing, confident that this would allow organizers to engage with meaning-making and grief on their own terms. Additionally, as a theology student, I was particularly interested in *shared* forms of meaning-making, and therefore decided to use a workshop model in which personal narratives could be shared in a group setting.

Ultimately, in using narrative writing, I wanted to understand how organizers gave meaning to their *personal lived experience* of climate grief. And in sharing these narratives in a group of peers, I was curious as to how *shared meaning-making* could help with the grieving and healing process. Therefore, my research questions became:

*How do young climate organizers aged 18-31 based in Edmonton*

*/amiskwaciwaskâhikan, Treaty 6 give meaning to their experience of climate grief?*

- *What is their lived experience of climate grief?*
- *How can sharing this experience in a group setting lead to healing?*

## 1.2 Situating Myself in the Web

In line with the qualitative research principle of reflexivity, I will take this section to place myself within the context of my research. For Berger, reflexivity is important in qualitative research in order for the researcher to “take responsibility for one’s own situatedness within the research and the effect that it may have.”<sup>1</sup> This is especially relevant to my research because I knew, and had organized with, all of the participants at some point in time, making me an ‘insider’ researcher or a ‘complete member researcher.’<sup>2</sup> As I explore below in the methodology chapter, this close proximity to participants can provide both benefits and risks. Developing a practice of reflexivity is an important way for insider researchers to minimize these risks,<sup>3</sup> and in the interest of this, I will briefly outline my own situatedness below.

I am a 30-year-old cis-gendered, able-bodied, white woman and third-generation settler on Treaty 6 territory. My maternal grandparents and paternal great-grandparents immigrated from the Netherlands and settled in close-knit communities centered around

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<sup>1</sup> Roni Berger, “Now I See It, Now I Don’t: Researcher’s Position and Reflexivity in Qualitative Research,” *Qualitative Research* 15, no. 2 (2015): 220, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794112468475>.

<sup>2</sup> Patricia A. Adler, *Membership Roles in Field Research*, ed. Peter Adler (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1987).

<sup>3</sup> Sonya Corbin Dwyer and Jennifer L. Buckle, “The Space Between: On Being an Insider-Outsider in Qualitative Research,” *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 8, no. 1 (March 2009): 59, <https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690900800105>.

the Dutch Christian Reformed Church. Both sets of my grandparents were farmers while my parents have held professional positions in healthcare for most of their adult lives, making enough money to help me and my siblings pay for university. Many of the educational and professional opportunities I have been afforded have been enabled, at least in part, by both intergenerational wealth made off stolen land and the privileges that come with being white, cis-gendered, and able-bodied in our society.

These aspects of my identity place me in a very specific web of relationality and power dynamics. As much as possible, I have tried throughout the research process to intentionally reflect on how my positionality might be influencing the way I engage with the research. These reflections often took place through poetry, journaling, and conversations with close friends. As elaborated on in my methodology chapter, I also used various poetic inquiry and narrative métissage research techniques to help me keep my personal biases and perspectives as visible as possible.

### 1.3 An Initiation into Loss - Part I

The following is a piece of my own narrative that speaks to how I became interested in climate grief. Consistent with the chapters that follow, excerpts of my own narrative (whether in the form of story, poetry or self-reflection) are distinguished from other text by a black border.

—  
everything from both sides  
piling up  
being pushed to the edge  
until it's cracked, all folding  
uneasy, looming

and we're here

in it

this shadow  
this valley  
the eye

we live in times don't we,  
when anyone awake is breaking  
—

My awareness of climate grief as a concept began about two and half years ago, but my experience of it started much earlier. Although I did not initially think of it as grief, being a part of the climate movement meant constantly grappling with the reality of profound levels of current and anticipated loss. The following is a story of how I came to see the deep impacts these losses were having on me and my friends, and how I learned what it might mean to heal from them.

My first memorable encounter with climate loss happened during an undergraduate course on climate change and sociology. Going into the course, I remember thinking I had a good handle on climate change; I knew it was bad, but I was pretty sure we still had time to turn things around. The course material shattered this illusion very quickly. I learned we were on track for drastic and irreversible levels of warming by the end of the century, enough to result in widescale crop failure, devastating natural disasters, and huge levels of human displacement. This was not some distant and abstract future. I realized

with horror that I was guaranteed to witness, and likely experience, many of these things during my lifetime.

Looking back, I can see I was in shock. While on a logical level I understood that all this meant a drastically different future than the one I'd imagined for myself, I had no idea how to start unpacking the implications of what I had learned. So, like many others, I went on with my life, focusing on work and school, trying not to think about the massive ecological and political shifts that I now knew were coming.

That all changed when I moved back to Alberta two years later. As soon as I returned, I was recruited by my sister to join a local climate group and very quickly became immersed in a new world of climate activism. We were doing large scale banner drops, birddogging politicians, and at one point, blockading the entrance of the Kinder Morgan headquarters, all in protest of the Trans Mountain pipeline expansion (TMX) and increasing tar sands extraction. Initially, it was thrilling. Although the reality of the climate crisis was still daunting, it felt easier to face somehow; I felt like I was part of something real and tangible that was helping address the problem.

Eventually however, and inevitably, loss started catching up with us. Our blockade at the Kinder Morgan headquarters and subsequent arrest hardly got any media attention, but did attract endless vile and misogynist attacks from online trolls. Then, not only did the movement we were a part of fail to stop TMX, in May of 2018, the Liberal government bought the pipeline outright, for \$4.5 billion public dollars, to guarantee it would get built. A year later, the Liberals announced a 'climate emergency' to a flurry of self-congratulation, and then, in a move too ridiculous to parody, gave TMX its final rubber stamp the very next day.

Without me realizing it, these losses were beginning to impact me deeply. Over the spring and summer of 2018, I was working out of town and spending most of my time outside. For the first time, the reality of the climate crisis was hitting me. I thought about it constantly, often lying awake at night thinking about what was coming, too anxious to sleep. It started affecting my work and my relationships. I was either emotionally detached or angry and ranting. I was finding less and less meaning in my work and struggled to imagine my future past the next few years. Over the course of the summer,

all of these emotions built up within me, and I moved back to the city in the fall full of angry and anxious energy.

Thankfully, when I got there, there happened to be the perfect place to channel all my anger and anxiety. The incumbent member of Parliament for the only federal riding in Alberta to *ever* go to the New Democratic Party was retiring. A nomination race was announced to select the candidate who would replace her and run in the following year's federal election. It was an incredible opportunity. A small group of us who had organized together for the past year recognized this and, to our own surprise, started weighing the pros and cons. We had no money, hardly any experience and nowhere near enough time to run a successful campaign. Everyone we talked to said we didn't stand a chance. We decided to do it anyways.

Starting out, we didn't think we stood a chance of winning. Instead, we aimed to push our opponent further left and prove to the party old guard that truly progressive policies could get real traction. But then, over the next few months, the campaign took on a life of its own. We raised thousands of dollars, signed up hundreds of new members and recruited enough volunteers and canvassers to knock on the door of every NDP member in the whole riding twice. A powerful community began to coalesce around the campaign. Dozens of volunteers, young and old, started devoting countless hours to the campaign, many of them saying this was the first time they ever felt truly represented by a political candidate.

It was just a few weeks out from the election when we started to think seriously about what it would mean to win. What would it mean to have one of us, not some out-of-touch politician, but one of our own, in a position like this? Someone who could finally talk about the climate crisis with the level of urgency that was needed. Someone who could draw essential connection between climate policy and racial and economic justice. It would be a game-changer. More than ever before, we started to see what was at stake and as we counted down days until the vote, campaign headquarters (the living room in a house several of us shared) became a near constant flurry of anxious excitement and activity.



The vote was held on November 26. We packed into an old community hall along with hundreds of others, many of them new members we had recruited. The space was buzzing with energy. Each candidate gave a speech, members cast their votes, and then waited anxiously while the numbers were tallied.

We had lost.

We lost by just 19 votes. I remember the feelings of shock and disbelief, and then heavy defeat as organizers and volunteers gathered quietly in circles in the back of the hall, and eventually moved to a bar down the street. We had all poured so much into this—countless hours, late nights, several of us putting work or school on hold to live and breathe this campaign. We signed up more new members and gained more momentum and energy than any campaign in the ridings' recent history. And it still wasn't enough.

As we sat in that bar crying and commiserating together, it quickly became clear we were not only mourning the loss of this campaign but also the intangible losses of the climate crisis, the ones we had never had a chance to grieve. We were mourning the future we had once imagined for ourselves and our loved ones, for the children we couldn't have, for the young people we knew who were so terrified they couldn't sleep at night. We were mourning the simple fact that this campaign represented exactly what we had already come up against, again and again in our organizing: we could give *every single thing* we have to this fight, and it would still not be enough.

The mood that night was heavy, and the following few months were incredibly hard. What's remarkable though, is that looking back, what I remember most isn't the anger, the weariness, or even the despair—it is simply how *good* it had felt to finally share all this.

Although it hurt to know that so many other young people were in as much pain as I was, crying with others felt like this incredible release. All of this emotion that previously had nowhere to go, finally found its place. I didn't know how alone I had felt with my grief until I had the chance to share it. That experience the night we lost, and in the debriefs we held in the weeks that followed, helped me feel closer and more committed to my community than ever before. But the more I reflected, the more I

realized how incredibly rare this kind of experience was—I had been organizing with these people for years and we had *never* had the chance to grieve together like this.

I started thinking about what it would look like for me to help create intentional opportunities for this. I didn't know what this would look like exactly, but I did know it would have to somehow make space for a lot of difficult, big questions. That's how, just a few months later, I found myself back in school, training to become a chaplain. And one year later, when it was time to decide on my thesis topic, I knew precisely what I wanted to write about. What exactly happened in the bar that night? Why did it feel so good to share our sorrow with one another? And most of all, how could I make space for it to happen again?

## 1.4 How to Talk About Surrender Without Saying God

—  
The world loves you.

See!  
It is safe to grieve

—

Although spirituality is not the topic of my research, it did play a foundational role in the research process. In the following section, I reflect on my own theological foundations and explore how they gave rise to the themes of relationship, surrender, and healing—all of which came to define my research. First however, I will clarify how I am using the word theology. I understand the term in its most expansive sense, with inspiration from John Troken who writes, “whenever we examine what is creative or destructive about life and relationships, we are theologizing. Whenever we struggle with sin and human limitation, we are theologizing... Whenever we attempt to bridge

separation and cut-off, we do theology.”<sup>4</sup> For Troken, theology can be both a reflective practice (“examine what is creative or destructive about life”) as well as an engaged practice (“struggle with sin” or “attempt to bridge separation”). At their core, both ways of ‘doing’ theology are essentially about relationship—either reflecting on the nature of one’s relationship to the world, or seeking restoration (healing) in that relationship.

Being raised in the Christian Reformed Church meant inheriting a theology that understood relationship, and the restoration of relationship, in a very specific way. Like other Christian denominations, Reformed doctrine states that although human beings originally existed in perfect relationship with God, human sin fractured this connection, making all humans worthy of eternal punishment.<sup>5</sup> However, instead of condemning all of humanity, God sent his son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross, atoning for human sin and saving them from eternal punishment.<sup>6</sup> Of course, the question of *who* exactly is saved has caused much debate within Christianity, and it is here that the Reformed church diverges from other traditions.

The Reformed church upholds what they call the theology of election. This doctrine states that “before the foundation of the world, by sheer grace,” God elected certain people to have faith in Jesus Christ and therefore be saved from eternal punishment.<sup>7</sup> These people (the ‘elect’) were not chosen because they are any more

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<sup>4</sup> John Trokan, “Models of Theological Reflection: Theory and Praxis,” *Journal of Catholic Education* 1, no. 2 (1997): 144, <https://doi.org/10.15365/joce.0102041997>.

<sup>5</sup> Christian Reformed Church in North America, *The Canons of Dordt*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2011), <https://www.crcna.org/sites/default/files/CanonsofDordt.pdf>. 129.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

deserving than others, but rather, so that through them God may be able to “demonstrate his mercy.”<sup>8</sup> The doctrine suggests that those who genuinely believe in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are members of the elect; their faith is a ‘fruit of election,’ given to them by God and evidence of their restored relationship with God.

This formulation of God’s relationship with humanity had a significant impact on me growing up. On one hand, I remember being deeply reassured by the fact that there was nothing I had to do in order to earn God’s love. However, at the same time, I was disturbed to be taught that there were billions of people that God chose *not* to give faith to, therefore condemning them to eternal punishment. Like so many others, I could not reconcile this punitory God with the merciful God I knew experientially to be true, and gradually grew away from the church.

Thankfully, I was eventually introduced to the writings of contemporary Christian contemplatives like Richard Rohr and Thomas Merton, and historical Christian mystics like Theresa of Avila who understood humanity’s relationship with God in a much different way. According to these teachers, restored relationship is not something limited to a handful of believers, nor is it something needed in order to heal humanity’s severed relationship with God. For them, the relationship between us and God was never severed at all, it is only *forgotten*, and forgotten by a part of ourselves that Merton refers to as the false self.<sup>9</sup> The false self operates under the illusion that we are separate from God and must therefore do or believe the right thing in order to be reunited with God’s love. But

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> James Finley, *Merton’s Palace of Nowhere*, (Notre Dame, IN: Ava Maria Press, 1978).

for these contemplatives, the only thing that can ever separate us from God is the thought that we are separate from God!<sup>10</sup> Therefore, in the contemplative tradition, humans do not need to earn or ‘prove’ restored relationship in any way. Rather, they simply need to let themselves remember it or *experience* it, again and again (a process that for Christian contemplatives, is done by surrendering to and experiencing God’s perfect love through the practices of prayer and contemplation<sup>11</sup>). It was this universal understanding of relationship and healing, rather than the exclusive understanding taught by the Reformed tradition, that served as the theological foundation of my research process.

Based on my theological understanding of restored relationship, I approached my research with the belief that the healing of climate grief would happen through a process of remembered and *re-experienced* relationship. I wanted the workshops to provide opportunities for this kind of relational restoration, but I knew that using Christian metaphors and language would likely not be helpful. Therefore, I found ways to talk about and engage with the healing process that were not limited by Christian language and ritual. One good example of this was the series of acknowledgements I wrote to be read aloud as part of the opening ritual of the workshops.

*We start by acknowledging the land we’re on. We’re on Treaty 6 territory, amiskwaciwâskahikan, traditional territory of the Nehiyaw, Niitsitapi, Denesūliné, Nakota Sioux, Saulteaux, and Métis Nation.*

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<sup>10</sup> Thomas Keating, *Open Mind, Open Heart: The Contemplative Dimension of the Gospel*, (Amity House: 1986), 44.

<sup>11</sup> James Finley and Caroline Myss, *Transforming Trauma: A Seven-Step Process for Spiritual Healing*, (Louisville, CO: Sounds True, 2009).

*We acknowledge the peoples who walked this land for millennia before settlers arrived, and continue to live here today. We recognize colonization as an ongoing process and know that as settlers we have a role in dismantling it.*

*We thank those who protected and sustained this land over generations, and we thank all those who care for her today.*

*We thank the land herself—the soil, forests, air—that work together to sustain life and sustain us. We acknowledge that we are part of the kisiskâciwanisîpiy (North Saskatchewan River) watershed. We thank the river, and the glacier that feeds her, for giving life to us and to all who call this place home.*

*We acknowledge our own biological ancestors, living and dead, who gave each of us life. We thank them for the sacrifices they made that allow us to be here today.*

*We acknowledge our spiritual and political ancestors, those who created and sustained the wisdom traditions we take part in today, specifically the tradition of liberatory social movements!*

*We know we belong to a wide community and long history of people working for liberation around the world. We thank all those who have gone before us, and we think of the generations to come. We do this work for them.*

*Lastly, we recognize there is a healing process bigger than ourselves, one that is present here today and always working to bring us towards wholeness and towards each other. We know our task is simply to participate in, and surrender to, this healing.*

These acknowledgments were designed to lay the groundwork for restored relationship, and therefore healing, by using spiritually inclusive language. I first did this by invoking the social, ecological, and political webs in which we live, intending to counter the illusion of separation and remind all of us of the inherently relational nature of our existence. However, I also wanted a non-religious way to talk about surrender.

Surrendering control is understood as essential to the work of grief—it is the only way our pain can be expressed in the full, honest, and unpredictable way that is needed.<sup>12</sup> I wanted participants to know that it would be safe to let go of control, that there would be something there to hold and to guide them. I was confident that the group itself would provide that sense of support for many participants, but I also wanted to reference something that transcended the group.

Eventually, in the last stanza, I settled on the simple phrase “a healing process bigger than ourselves.” I liked the way this framed healing as a force that transcended the group, one trusted to steer and guide the process as they entered into the uncertainty of grief. As I explore in more detail in the findings chapter, while participants did not necessarily use the terms surrender or restored relationship when reflecting on the workshops, they *did* describe experiences that aligned with my understanding of these concepts. Again and again, they referred to experiences of deep and meaningful connection or reconnection (with themselves, others, or something greater), suggesting that they did in fact experience restored relationship. Several also described a process of ‘giving themselves over’ to their emotions, of ‘speaking openly from the heart,’ or of getting into a ‘flow’—all of which seemed to denote a kind of surrender.

In the end, of course, it doesn’t really matter whether healing is discussed in terms of connection or in terms of surrender and restoration—all of these words are inadequate anyways. What mattered was the *experience* of healing. What mattered was that participants went away from their time together transformed in some way. As Troken

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<sup>12</sup> Anderson and Mitchell, *All Our Losses, All Our Grief: Resources for Pastoral Care*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), 101.

suggests above, theology is not only about reflecting on our relationships with the world, it is about actively *engaging* in these relationships. And, as we will see in the chapters ahead, the most meaningful part of the grieving process for participants was not what happened when they were writing or reflecting independently, it was what happened when they were together; what happened when they were engaged in the embodied, living space that opened up between them as they wove together their stories and their pain.

## 1.5 Choice of Methodology

I chose to use arts-based research (ABR) as my research methodology, while also including methods from both narrative métissage and poetic inquiry styles of research. ABR is a diverse and transdisciplinary methodology that incorporates art as an integral part of the research process.<sup>13</sup> I chose ABR because I wanted to integrate narrative-writing and poetry as core parts of my research and because I appreciated its flexible and holistic approach.<sup>14</sup> Using ABR permitted me to cross the boundaries of various disciplines, integrate multiple research methods, and adapt my research design easily as

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<sup>13</sup> Gioia Chilton and Patricia Leavy, “Arts-Based Research Practice: Merging Social Research and the Creative Arts,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research. Oxford Library of Psychology*, ed. Patricia Leavy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 403-423.

<sup>14</sup> Patricia Leavy, *Method Meets Art: Arts-Based Research Practice*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: The Guilford Press, 2015).



changes arose. Lastly, art helped the research access a level of emotional depth and honesty not always accessible within other forms of communication.<sup>15</sup>

As I explain in more depth in the chapter on methodology, I integrated art into my research in three key forms: narratives written by participants, found poems I created using participant narratives, and the thesis itself. Participants wrote their narratives as part of a process called narrative métissage wherein they each wrote about their personal experience of climate grief, and then interwove these narratives with those of several others.<sup>16</sup> This allowed my research to capture the deep meaning coming from personal narrative and the meaning that arose from the interweaving process itself.

In order to capture the meaning from the personal narratives, I used found poetry as a form of poetic inquiry. Found poems are made by selecting words and phrases from another source (in my case, participant narratives) and rearranging them to give them new meaning. Finally, when compiling my findings in my thesis, I again turned to narrative métissage, this time using it as an artistic research method instead of a workshop technique.<sup>17</sup> Using this method, I wove pieces of my own narrative throughout the body of the thesis in the form of poetry, self-reflection and story-telling, encouraging both myself and the reader to engage with the subject matter in a deeper, more holistic way.

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<sup>15</sup> Susan Finley, “Arts-based Research,” in *Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research: Perspectives, Methodologies, Examples, and Issues*, ed. Gary J. Knowles and Andra L. Cole (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2008), 29–40.

<sup>16</sup> Kathy Bishop et. al., “Narrative Métissage as an Innovative Engagement Practice,” *Engaged Scholar Journal* 5, no. 2 (Spring 2019): 4.

<sup>17</sup> For an example, see Sheila Simpkins, “Narrative Métissage: Crafting Empathy and Understanding of Self/Other,” (PhD diss., University of Victoria, 2012), <http://hdl.handle.net/1828/3961>.

## 1.6 What Lies Ahead

In the pages ahead, I explore the topic of climate grief and answer my research questions in the following way. First, Chapter 2 gives context to my study by reviewing relevant literature on the topics of climate grief, climate change and mental health, grief and loss, and various theological themes. This material provides both the empirical work to justify my research design and the conceptual frameworks used to make sense of and bring meaning to my data. Next, Chapter 3 covers research methodology. Here, I summarize the theoretical foundations of research, describe my research design and process, and outline ethical issues and how I addressed them. The research findings are presented in Chapter 4. In this section, I respond to each part of my research question, analyzing and interpreting the data and connecting it back to the literature. Lastly, in Chapter 5, I conclude my findings, explore potential applications and future areas of inquiry, and end with a reflection on how the research process impacted my own journey with climate grief.

As stated above, my intention with this research was to understand how organizers make sense of and give meaning to their experience of climate grief. As I will demonstrate, participants used a range of emotions to make sense of their grief. Ranging from anger and anxiety, to sorrow and despair, these emotions revealed climate grief to be a deeply painful and impactful part of participants' lives.

However, an investigation into what it meant for participants to *share* these emotions and narratives with one another added nuance to the first finding. For many participants, a significant part of the pain of climate grief lay in its alienation. Because

they had so few opportunities to grieve with others, participants had learned to cope with grief individually, often through numbing, avoidance and blame, strategies which, in the long run, led to painful feelings of disconnection. When they were able to share their narratives with one another, they overcame this painful disconnection. As I will show, the sharing of narratives helped participants feel more connected to themselves, each other, and the broader community, allowing them to access collective and enduring forms of meaning that made it easier to face the pain of loss going forward.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

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There is metal or something else  
loud against itself  
in the distance

A tiny spider traversing  
my thigh  
wood frogs all scrambling to go  
silent at the same time

Can you believe how much falls apart  
before we ever get a chance to hold it?

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Despite being a relatively new concept to academia, climate grief is receiving a groundswell of attention in popular writing.<sup>18</sup> The small body of existing academic research shows climate-related grief to be a legitimate and rapidly growing phenomenon, one urgently in need of further research. More specifically, a review of the related literature demonstrates the need for additional research with the communities thought to be most at risk of climate grief (including young people and those working on climate issues) as well as research which explores possible interventions for the phenomenon. These appeals situate my own study as a small but critical piece in the growing field of climate grief research.

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<sup>18</sup> For a collection of links to recent articles see: Wikipedia contributors, “Ecological Grief,” Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, last modified April 1, 2021, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ecological\\_grief](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ecological_grief).

Due to the newness of climate grief as an academic concept, reviewing the literature means drawing from multiple fields of research, including mental health and climate change, grief and loss, and spiritual care. As I will show, each of these fields provides theories that are incredibly relevant to the study of climate grief in young organizers, including the concepts of indirect climate grief,<sup>19</sup> disenfranchised grief,<sup>20</sup> nonfinite loss,<sup>21</sup> assumptive worlds,<sup>22</sup> narrative reconstruction,<sup>23</sup> ritual containers,<sup>24</sup> and divine momentum.<sup>25</sup>

## 2.1 Climate Grief

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feel like shit and no, I don't want to write about it but  
here's to twisting my own dumb arm  
for the sake of the tHeSis

feels like shit, knowing how much is already lost

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<sup>19</sup> Susan Clayton et. al., *Mental Health and Our Changing Climate: Impacts, Implications, and Guidance*, (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, and ecoAmerica, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.1037/e503122017-001>.

<sup>20</sup> Ashlee Cunsolo and Neville R. Ellis, "Ecological Grief as a Mental Health Response to Climate Change-Related Loss," *Nature Climate Change* 8, no. 4 (2018): 275, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41558-018-0092-2>.

<sup>21</sup> Darcy L. Harris and Howard R. Winokuer, "Living Losses: Nonfinite Loss, Ambiguous Loss, and Chronic Sorrow," in *Principles and Practice of Grief Counseling* (New York: Springer Publishing Company, 2019), 121–37, <https://doi.org/10.1891/9780826173331.0008>.

<sup>22</sup> Murray Parkes, "Psycho-Social Transitions: A Field for Study," *Social Science and Medicine* 5, no. 2 (January 1971): 101–15, [https://doi.org/10.1016/0037-7856\(71\)90091-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/0037-7856(71)90091-6).

<sup>23</sup> Robert A. Neimeyer, "Fostering Posttraumatic Growth: A Narrative Elaboration," *Psychological Inquiry* 15, no. 1 (January 2004): 53–59.

<sup>24</sup> Herbert Anderson, "How Rituals Heal," *Word & World* 30, no. 1 (2010): 41–50.

<sup>25</sup> Alan Wolfelt, *Counseling Skills for Companioning the Mourner: The Fundamentals of Effective Grief Counseling*, (Fort Collins, Colorado: Companion Press, 2016), 92.

and how it can't ever come back

feels like shit thinking about the way children were meant to meet the world,  
slowly, with much texture,  
spending August in cool bodies of water, calling out to birds flying south, lagging  
behind uncles hunting.

can't we all see how precious this is? water, the hunt,  
the cooing sound of cranes, drifting up tall columns of air, those slow spirals?

don't we all have throats  
don't they all catch

goddammit, my guts wrung out about this long ago,  
where does everyone else carry this hurt

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The concept of climate grief is closely related to several other concepts including climate anxiety, eco-anxiety and, most notably, eco-grief or ecological grief. Ecological grief is understood most simply as “a natural response to ecological losses,”<sup>26</sup> and has also been referred to as ecological distress,<sup>27</sup> environmental grief,<sup>28</sup> and solastalgia.<sup>29</sup>

In existing research, the terms climate anxiety and ecological grief are both utilized with more frequency than climate grief. Some researchers identify climate grief

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<sup>26</sup> Cunsolo and Ellis, “Ecological Grief as a Mental Health Response to Climate Change-Related Loss,” 275.

<sup>27</sup> Susan Wardell, “Naming and Framing Ecological Distress,” *Medicine Anthropology Theory*, 7 (September 2020): 187–201, <https://doi.org/10.17157/mat.7.2.768>.

<sup>28</sup> Kriss A. Kevorkian, “Environmental Grief,” in *Non-Death Loss and Grief*, ed. Darcy Harris (Taylor & Francis, 2019), 216-226.

<sup>29</sup> Glenn Albrecht et al., “Solastalgia: The Distress Caused by Environmental Change,” *Australasian Psychiatry* 15, no. 6 (December 2007): 95-98, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10398560701701288>.

as a sub-category of ecological grief,<sup>30</sup> while others understand it as falling under the umbrella of climate anxiety.<sup>31</sup> Alternatively, I understand climate grief as a unique term that is closely related to climate anxiety and ecological grief, but that describes the phenomenon I am studying in ways these other terms do not. I found that the *core* losses being grieved by my participants had less to do with ecological systems and more to do with the underlying systems of oppression *causing* ecological loss—specifically capitalism, colonialism and white supremacy. Although some ecological grief researchers include social losses in their definition of the term,<sup>32</sup> I am inclined to believe that because of its connotations, the term ecological is less likely to communicate the political and social components of this grief.

Similarly, in my view, our cultural associations with the term anxiety could both individualize and pathologize the phenomenon and fail to indicate the wide range of possible emotional responses to climate-related loss, both healthy and unhealthy. Alternatively, in my mind, the term climate grief is better equipped to both capture the various emotional responses to climate loss and frame these responses as part of a necessary, shared, and ongoing grieving process (rather than seeing them as symptoms of a pathology that needs to be cured).

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<sup>30</sup> Ashlee Cunsolo, “Ecological Grief as a Mental Health Response to Climate Change-Related Loss.”

<sup>31</sup> Pihkala Panu, “Anxiety and the Ecological Crisis: An Analysis of Eco-Anxiety and Climate Anxiety,” *Sustainability* 12, no. 7836 (September 2020): 7836–7836, <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12197836>.

<sup>32</sup> Ashlee Cunsolo et al., “Ecological Grief and Anxiety: The Start of a Healthy Response to Climate Change?,” *The Lancet Planetary Health* 4, no. 7 (July 2020): appendix, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2542-5196\(20\)30144-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2542-5196(20)30144-3).

### 2.1.1 Empirical work

The most relevant empirical research on the topic of climate-related grief was conducted by Cunsolo and Ellis. These researchers studied the cultural and psychological impacts of climate-related ice-loss on Inuit communities in Nunatsiavut, Labrador, and drought on family farmers in the Australian wheatbelt.<sup>33</sup> Notably, the researchers observed significant grief responses, not only over experienced ecological and cultural losses, but also over anticipated future losses.<sup>34</sup> This led them to identify a form of climate-related anticipatory grief that could be based both on “already-experienced changes” or “projected changes.”<sup>35</sup> According to Cunsolo and Ellis, anticipatory climate grief is generally “not linked to any one event or break moment, and develops over time.”<sup>36</sup> Because it generally does not have an acute onset, the authors also add that anticipatory grief can be ambiguous, making it difficult to articulate and heal from. Significantly for my purposes, Cunsolo and Ellis also suggest young people may be particularly impacted by anticipatory grief and predict the prevalence of it will increase over time.<sup>37</sup> In response to this, they call urgently for more research into the risk factors and possible interventions for climate grief. Thus far, the concept has hardly been

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<sup>33</sup> Cunsolo and Ellis, “Ecological Grief as a Mental Health Response to Climate Change-Related Loss.”

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 278.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*



researched, likely because, as the authors note, climate grief is not generally acknowledged in our culture, making it a form of disenfranchised grief.<sup>38</sup>

Two other notable examples of empirical research on climate grief are found in work by Randall and by Gillespie documenting climate grief and anxiety within climate activist circles.<sup>39</sup> Interestingly, both researchers emphasize the power of using group discussion to help climate activists grieve. Randall suggests that group settings help participants deepen their awareness of their own response to loss,<sup>40</sup> while Gillespie found that workshop participants felt more grounded and were able to look to the future with more curiosity and less fear.<sup>41</sup> Gillespie warns, however, that without care, climate grief discussions can devolve into rumination on despair and hopelessness, effectively “immobilising individuals and groups.”<sup>42</sup> Nonetheless, Gillespie and Randall both maintain that, when facilitated carefully, group discussions remain one of the most effective ways to process climate grief and climate anxiety.

In sum, empirical research suggests that climate grief is a form of disenfranchised grief, can often be anticipatory and ambiguous, and impacts young people and activists in particular. Lastly, intervention most commonly supported by existing literature is that of

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 275.

<sup>39</sup> Rosemary Randall, "Loss and Climate Change: The Cost of Parallel Narratives," *Ecopsychology* 1, no. 3 (September 2009): 118-129, <https://doi.org/10.1089/eco.2009.0034>; Sally Gillespie, "Climate Change Imaginings and Depth Psychology: Reconciling Present and Future Worlds," in *Environmental Change and the World's Futures: Ecologies, Ontologies and Mythologies*, ed. Jonathan P. Marshall and Linda H. Connor, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016), 181–195, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315776552>; Sally Gillespie, *Climate Crisis and Consciousness: Reimagining Our World and Ourselves* (London: Routledge, 2020).

<sup>40</sup> Randall, "Loss and Climate Change."

<sup>41</sup> Gillespie, *Climate Crisis*.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 129.

carefully facilitated group discussion which are thought to increase self-awareness in participants and decrease their fear of the future.

### 2.1.2 Theoretical work and practical resources

Although empirical research on climate grief is still limited, more and more scholars are contributing important theoretical work on the topic. Several scholars provide comprehensive overviews on the cultural foundations and implications of climate-related grief,<sup>43</sup> while others echo Randall and Gillespie by advocating for collective spaces in which to mourn climate-related loss.<sup>44</sup> Kretz helps make sense of the significance of shared spaces with the term *peer scaffolding* which is a psychological concept describing how individuals grow in agency when they are part of a community in which their hopes are actively recognized and respected.<sup>45</sup>

Thankfully, there is a growing number of practical programs and resources being offered to help people address their climate grief. For example, Macy developed The Work That Reconnects, a series of eco-grief and climate grief workshops offered around

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<sup>43</sup> Ashlee Cunsolo Willox, "Climate Change as the Work of Mourning," *Ethics and the Environment* 17, no. 2 (Fall 2012): 137-164, <https://doi:10.2979/ethicsenviro.17.2.137>; Ashlee Consolo and Karen Landman eds., *Mourning Nature: Hope at the Heart of Ecological Loss and Grief*, (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2017).

<sup>44</sup> Panu Pihkala, "Environmental Education after Sustainability: Hope in the Midst of Tragedy," *Global Discourse* 7, no. 1 (2017): 109–27, <https://doi:10.1080/23269995.2017.1300412>; Lisa Kretz, "Emotional Solidarity: Ecological Emotional Outlaws Mourning Environmental Loss and Empowering Positive Change," in *Mourning Nature: Hope at the Heart of Ecological Loss and Grief*, ed. Ashlee Cunsolo and Karen Landman, (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2017), 258–291.

<sup>45</sup> Kretz, "Emotional Solidarity."

the world, while programs like Joyality apply her work to a local context.<sup>46</sup> In an extensive and valuable overview of these and other group programs designed to help people process their emotions around social and environmental issues, Jo Hamilton discusses the importance of facilitators creating a container to hold these emotions through things like partner sharing, creative activities, connecting with nature, group ritual or mindfulness exercises.<sup>47</sup> She also emphasizes the importance of designing programs which offer ongoing support to participants.<sup>48</sup>

Lastly, several conversation guides and workbooks help people explore their emotional response to the climate crisis and to climate-related loss,<sup>49</sup> including resources specific to young people in a school setting.<sup>50</sup> Various authors have also outlined or

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<sup>46</sup> Joanna Macy and Molly Young Brown, *Coming Back to Life: The Updated Guide to the Work that Reconnects* (Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers, 2014); “Joyality: Empowering Conscious Change-makers,” The Joyality Program, <http://www.joyality.org/> (accessed April 12, 2020).

<sup>47</sup> Jo Hamilton, “Emotions, Reflexivity and the Long Haul: What We Do About How We Feel About Climate Change,” ed. Paul Hoggett, *Climate Psychology. Studies in the Psychosocial* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Rosemary Randall and Andy Brown, *In Time for Tomorrow: The Carbon Conversations Handbook* (Stirling: The Surefoot Effect, 2015); David Hicks, *Educating for Hope in Troubled Times: Climate Change and the Transition to a Post-Carbon Future* (London: Institute of Education Press, 2014); Climate Therapy Alliance - Pacific Northwest, *Emotional Resilience Toolkit for Climate Work* (Climate Therapy Alliance, 2019).

<sup>50</sup> Marie Eaton, “Navigating Anger, Fear, Grief, and Despair,” in *Contemplative Approaches to Sustainability in Higher Education: Theory and Practice*, eds. Marie Eaton, Holly J. Hughes, Jean MacGregor, 41-54, (Taylor and Francis, 2016).

discussed specific spiritual practices that may help with mourning, such as contemplative reflection,<sup>51</sup> liturgical lamentation,<sup>52</sup> and collective mourning rituals.<sup>53</sup>

It is clear from the literature on climate grief, whether empirical, theoretical or practical, that climate grief is a real and growing phenomenon; it is disenfranchised and often anticipatory; and that those who are younger and those who engage in climate work are at higher risk of being impacted. Additionally, there is a clear consensus that one of the best ways to support people in this grief is to combine temporary, carefully facilitated spaces for collective grieving with ongoing community supports.

## 2.2 Climate Change and Mental Health

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I walk on a path, alongside many,  
tuning my ears to the wind.

Every morning I wake earlier so I can go further, gathering up all manner of things to tell you, already I've begun to reach out in my dreams. I tell the young ones, do not be afraid. I tell them they are already perfect. I tell them Esther 4:14, perhaps you were born for exact such times as these.

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Researchers and mental health professional are beginning to recognize the importance of studying and addressing the psychological impacts of climate change.

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<sup>51</sup> Douglas Burton-Christie, "The Gift of Tears: Loss, Mourning and the Work of Ecological Restoration," *Worldviews* 15, no. 1 (March 2011): 29-46, <https://doi:10.1163/156853511X553787>.

<sup>52</sup> Timothy Hessel-Robinson, "'The Fish of the Sea Perish:' Lamenting Ecological Ruin," *Liturgy* 27, no. 2 (April 2012): 40-48, <https://doi:10.1080/0458063X.2012.638789>.

<sup>53</sup> Francis Weller, *The Wild Edge of Sorrow: Rituals of Renewal and the Sacred Work of Grief* (Berkeley, California: North Atlantic Books, 2015).

Mental health is affected by the climate crisis due to both direct impacts (such as experiencing acute stress from the loss of a home in a wildfire or sustaining trauma after exposure to heat-related violence) and indirect impacts (such as experiencing anxiety about how climate change will impact your future).<sup>54</sup> These indirect impacts are characterized by inducing “intense emotions associated with observation of climate change effects worldwide and anxiety and uncertainty about the unprecedented scale of current and future risks.”<sup>55</sup>

As suggested above, some researchers use the term ‘climate anxiety’ as a catch-all to describe the mental health impacts of climate change, distinguishing between mild symptoms such as sadness and an occasional decrease in daily functioning, to more severe symptoms such as insomnia, compulsive behavior, and states of depression.<sup>56</sup> Others examine these mental health impacts through the lens of trauma, using terms like collective trauma,<sup>57</sup> climate trauma,<sup>58</sup> or pre-traumatic stress syndrome (Pre-PTSS).<sup>59</sup> Still other frameworks include looking at the psychological impacts of climate change in

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<sup>54</sup> Clayton et. al., *Mental Health and Our Changing Climate: Impacts, Implications, and Guidance*.

<sup>55</sup> Thomas J. Doherty and Susan Clayton, “The Psychological Impacts of Global Climate Change,” *Psychology and Global Climate Change* 66, no. 4 (2011): 265-276. <http://pascal-francis.inist.fr/vibad/index.php?action=search&terms=24258477>.

<sup>56</sup> Panu, “Anxiety and the Ecological Crisis: An Analysis of Eco-Anxiety and Climate Anxiety.”

<sup>57</sup> Marlene F. Watson et al., “COVID-19 Interconnectedness: Health Inequity, the Climate Crisis, and Collective Trauma,” *Family Process* 59, no. 3 (2020): 832–46, <https://doi.org/10.1111/famp.12572>.

<sup>58</sup> Zhiwa Woodbury, “Climate Trauma: Toward a New Taxonomy of Trauma,” *Ecopsychology* 11, no. 1 (2019): 1–8, <https://doi.org/10.1089/eco.2018.0021>.

<sup>59</sup> Ann E. Kaplan, “Is Climate-Related Pre-Traumatic Stress Syndrome a Real Condition?,” *American Imago* 77, no. 1 (April 2020): 81–104, <https://doi.org/10.1353/aim.2020.0004>.

terms of distress<sup>60</sup> and coping strategies.<sup>61</sup> Again, a review of this diverse field indicates that the indirect mental health impacts of the climate crisis can be severe, and among the populations most at risk are young people<sup>62</sup> and climate organizers.<sup>63</sup>

### 2.2.1 Youth mental health

It is clear that the climate crisis is affecting young people's mental health. According to a recent survey, climate change was listed as the number one issue of concern for both Millennials and Generation Z.<sup>64</sup> Researchers have documented widespread anxiety<sup>65</sup> and pessimistic, even apocalyptic, outlooks on the future, especially in older adolescents.<sup>66</sup> In examining the ways young people cope with this anxiety, one

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<sup>60</sup> Kristina Searle and Kathryn Gow, "Do Concerns about Climate Change Lead to Distress?" *International Journal of Climate Change Strategies and Management* 2, no. 4 (November 2010): 362-379, <https://doi.org/10.1108/17568691011089891>.

<sup>61</sup> Graham L. Bradley et. al., "Distress and Coping in Response to Climate Change," in *Stress and Anxiety: Applications to Social and Environmental Threats, Psychological Well-being, Occupational Challenges, and Developmental Psychology Climate Change*, ed. K. Kaniasty, K. A. Moore, S. Howard & P. Buchwald, 33–42.

<sup>62</sup> Kevin J. Coyle and Lise Van Susteren, *The Psychological Effects of Global Warming on the United States: And Why the U.S. Mental Health Care System is Not Adequately Prepared* (Reston: National Wildlife Federation, 2012), [http://www.nwf.org/pdf/Reports/Psych\\_Effects\\_Climate\\_Change\\_Full\\_3\\_23.pdf](http://www.nwf.org/pdf/Reports/Psych_Effects_Climate_Change_Full_3_23.pdf).

<sup>63</sup> Rebecca Pearse, James Goodman, and Stuart Rosewarne, "Researching Direct Action against Carbon Emissions: A Digital Ethnography of Climate Agency," *Cosmopolitan Civil Societies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 2, no. 3 (2010): 76–103, <https://doi.org/10.5130/ccs.v2i3.1794>.

<sup>64</sup> "Deloitte Global Millennial Survey 2020," (Deloitte, 2020), <https://www2.deloitte.com/global/en/pages/about-deloitte/articles/millennialsurvey.html>.

<sup>65</sup> Maria Ojala, "Regulating Worry, Promoting Hope: How Do Children, Adolescents, and Young Adults Cope with Climate Change?" *International Journal of Environmental & Science Education* 7 (October 2012): 537-561.

<sup>66</sup> Cathie Holden, "Concerned Citizens: Children and the Future," *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice* 1, no 3 (November 2006): 231-246, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1746197906068122>.

researcher describes a phenomenon called *two track thinking*, in which adolescents are pessimistic about the global future, but relatively optimistic about their own personal futures.<sup>67</sup> This cognitive dissonance is explained as a coping mechanism used to mitigate anxiety and allow young people to continue living ‘normal’ lives in the face of catastrophic global predictions about the future.<sup>68</sup> However, Ojala characterizes these kinds of pessimistic coping mechanisms as maladaptive, instead advocating for the development of what she calls *meaning-focused coping*.<sup>69</sup> According to her, the process of finding meaning in a difficult situation can help generate positive emotions which “coexist with negative emotions and work as buffers, helping people confront the sources of their worry, thereby promoting problem-focused coping and active engagement.”<sup>70</sup> In order to start this process however, Ojala argues young people must first learn to identify both their current emotions and coping strategies.<sup>71</sup> Ojala’s conclusion supports the design of my research workshops which was intended to help participants first identify their emotions and then create meaning in the face of loss.

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<sup>67</sup> Steven Threadgold, “I Reckon My Life Will be Easy, But My Kids Will be Buggered: Ambivalence in Young People’s Positive Perceptions of Individual Futures and Their Visions of Environmental Collapse,” *Journal of Youth Studies* 15, no. 5 (February 2012): 17-32, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2011.618490>.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Maria Ojala, “Hope and Climate Change: The Importance of Hope for Environmental Engagement among Young People,” *Environmental Education Research* 18, no. 5 (October 2012): 625–642, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504622.2011.637157>; Ojala, “Regulating Worry.”

<sup>70</sup> Maria Ojala and Hans Bengtsson, “Young People’s Coping Strategies Concerning Climate Change: Relations to Perceived Communication with Parents and Friends and Proenvironmental Behavior,” *Environment and Behavior* 51, no. 8 (01 2019): 907–35, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013916518763894>. 910

<sup>71</sup> Ojala, “Regulating Worry.”

## 2.2.2 Mental health and the climate movement

Existing research on mental health and the climate movement reveals both positive and negative emotional impacts of doing climate organizing work. One study concluded that climate activism can help to relieve feelings of guilt and anxiety,<sup>72</sup> while another found that participating in collective action helped maintain and increase feelings of hope.<sup>73</sup> However, harmful emotional impacts were also noted. For example, although anger was found to be a powerful motivator of movement work, it was also shown to “cause activist burnout and internal conflicts, and thereby contribute to movement decline.”<sup>74</sup>

Burnout has been shown to be very common in young climate organizers, especially after periods of intense work.<sup>75</sup> In some cases, overwork can be an attempt by organizers to numb “the pain through manic activity,”<sup>76</sup> a coping mechanism that Narin suggests is developed due to a lack of social supports.<sup>77</sup> Unfortunately, activists often instead feel that *they* are to blame for their burnout, leading to what Narin calls a “double

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<sup>72</sup> Kristoffer Berglund, “There Is No Alternative: A Symbolic Interactionist Account of Swedish Climate Activists,” (master’s thesis, Lund University, 2019), <http://lup.lub.lu.se/student-papers/record/8990902>.

<sup>73</sup> Jochen Kleres and Åsa Wettergren, “Fear, Hope, Anger, and Guilt in Climate Activism.,” *Social Movement Studies* 16, no. 5 (September, 2017): 507–19.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 507.

<sup>75</sup> Karen Nairn, “Learning from Young People Engaged in Climate Activism: The Potential of Collectivizing Despair and Hope,” *Young* 27, no. 5 (January, 2019): 435–50, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1103308818817603>.

<sup>76</sup> Randall, “Loss and Climate Change: The Cost of Parallel Narratives,” 123.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 446.



burden” on young organizers in which they feel “responsible for solving climate change *and* for resolving their burnout”<sup>78</sup> (emphasis added).

The literature suggests that the lack of community supports for grief is incredibly harmful not only to the emotional and personal lives of climate organizers and activists, but also to the movement itself. While it is true that climate activists have been shown to make more space for their emotions when compared to climate scientists,<sup>79</sup> it is clear that more support is needed. To do so, Nairn, like so many others, advocates for shared discussion spaces,<sup>80</sup> while others studying mental health in the climate and environmental movements promote the use of spiritual practices<sup>81</sup> or the intentional use of organizing work itself<sup>82</sup> as ways organizers can process painful emotions and prevent burnout.

In sum, literature on mental health demonstrates that the psychological impacts of the climate crisis can be severe, even for those experiencing indirect and anticipated forms of loss. Young people and climate organizers are shown to be particularly vulnerable to this indirect loss, exhibiting high rates of emotional distress. Unfortunately, in the absence of adequate community supports, these populations are also at risk of

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<sup>78</sup> Nairn, “Learning from Young People Engaged in Climate Activism,” 444.

<sup>79</sup> Paul Hoggett and Rosemary Randall, “Engaging with Climate Change: Comparing the Cultures of Science and Activism,” *Environmental Values* 27, no. 3 (June 2018): 223–43, <https://doi.org/10.3197/096327118X15217309300813>.

<sup>80</sup> Nairn, “Learning from Young People Engaged in Climate Activism”; Randall, “Loss and Climate Change: The Cost of Parallel Narratives.”

<sup>81</sup> Jessica T. Kovan and John M. Dirkx, “‘Being Called Awake’: The Role of Transformative Learning in the Lives of Environmental Activists,” *Adult Education Quarterly* 53, no. 2 (February 2003): 99–118, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0741713602238906>.

<sup>82</sup> Sarah M. Pike, “Mourning Nature: The Work of Grief in Radical Environmentalism,” *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture* 10, no. 4 (2016): 419–41, <https://doi.org/10.1558/jsrnc.v10i4.30627>.

developing pessimistic or self-destructive coping mechanisms, findings which all provide valuable support and context for my research.

## 2.3 Grief and Loss Literature

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Grief

Check my phone too much, mind skipping  
heart split, dragging gravel behind fast cars or  
spilled streaming

all over the kitchen floor.

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Grief can be understood as either a noun (the experience of grief) or a verb (the act of grieving). As a noun, it describes our emotional response to loss,<sup>83</sup> whereas the verb form: *to grieve*, refers to the process by which these emotions are “acknowledged and relatively fully expressed.”<sup>84</sup> Meanwhile, loss can be defined as “the state of being deprived of, or being without something one has had.”<sup>85</sup> The field of research on these two topics offers several concepts and frameworks that will be helpful in addressing my research questions. First, the concepts of disenfranchised grief and non-finite loss can help contextualize the lived experience of climate grief, while Worden’s 4 Tasks model

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<sup>83</sup> David Fireman, “The Difference Between Grief and Mourning,” Centre for Grief Recovery and Therapeutic Services, (November 2017), <https://griefcounselor.org/the-difference-between-grief-and-mourning/>.

<sup>84</sup> Herbert Anderson and Kenneth R. Mitchell, *All Our Losses, All Our Grief: Resources for Pastoral Care* (Philadelphia: Westminster Pr, 1983), 99.

<sup>85</sup> Geraldine M. Humphrey and David G. Zimpfer, *Counselling for Grief and Bereavement*, 2nd ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2008), <http://sk.sagepub.com/books/counselling-for-grief-and-bereavement-2e>. 3.

and the theories of assumptive worlds and narrative reconstruction can offer valuable insight into the treatment of climate grief.

### 2.3.1 Disenfranchisement and nonfinite loss

As discussed above, climate grief has been categorized as a form of disenfranchised grief<sup>86</sup> which is defined as “the grief experienced by those who incur a loss that is not, or cannot be, openly acknowledged, publicly mourned or socially supported.”<sup>87</sup> Without these social supports in place, the mourner struggles to understand and process their grief, often resulting in a complicated and prolonged grieving process with undue pain and suffering.<sup>88</sup> Although many factors may contribute to the disenfranchisement of climate grief, the fact that much of climate-related loss can be understood as non-finite appears to be especially relevant.

Nonfinite loss refers to an ongoing form of loss, one that extends beyond a finite event such as a death.<sup>89</sup> An example of this is the continual loss experienced by someone dealing with a severe and chronic physical illness. Because of the ongoing nature of nonfinite loss, it often spans the lifetime of an individual, touching many parts of their world and preventing “normal developmental expectations from being met in some

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<sup>86</sup> Cunsolo and Ellis, “Ecological Grief as a Mental Health Response to Climate Change-Related Loss.”

<sup>87</sup> Kenneth J. Doka, “Disenfranchised Grief,” *Bereavement Care* 18, no. 3 (01 1999): 37–39, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02682629908657467>. 37.

<sup>88</sup> Doka, 39.

<sup>89</sup> Harris and Winokuer, “Living Losses: Nonfinite Loss, Ambiguous Loss, and Chronic Sorrow.”

aspect of life.”<sup>90</sup> For many struggling with nonfinite loss, their life is not what they had hoped it would be and this reality needs to be accommodated repeatedly throughout their lives, an experience that often leads to feelings of chronic hopelessness, despair, and dread as they anticipate the future.<sup>91</sup> Additionally, because so much of nonfinite loss is intangible, it is also often disenfranchised,<sup>92</sup> making it even more difficult to live with.

The concept of nonfinite loss is especially useful in the study of climate grief. While some climate-related losses may be finite (e.g., losses resulting from an extreme weather event), most of them could be understood as nonfinite (e.g., loss of ecosystem stability or loss of a dream for the future). Furthermore, it is these nonfinite climate losses that are preventing “normal developmental expectations from being met.”<sup>93</sup> This can be seen both in frontline communities where climate change threatens traditional ways of life (e.g., preventing young people from taking on expected roles such as hunting and fishing<sup>94</sup>), and in society at large (e.g., the rising number of young people deciding not to have children because of climate change<sup>95</sup>).

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>91</sup> Sandra J. Jones and Elizabeth Beck, “Disenfranchised Grief and Nonfinite Loss as Experienced by the Families of Death Row Inmates,” *Omega: Journal of Death and Dying* 54, no. 4 (January, 2007): 281–99, <https://doi.org/10.2190/A327-66K6-P362-6988>.

<sup>92</sup> Cynthia L. Schultz and Darcy L. Harris, “Giving Voice to Nonfinite Loss and Grief in Bereavement,” in *Grief and Bereavement in Contemporary Society: Bridging Research and Practice*, ed. Robert A. Neimeyer et al., (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2011), 235–245.

<sup>93</sup> Harris and Winokuer, 125.

<sup>94</sup> Cunsolo and Ellis, “Ecological Grief as a Mental Health Response to Climate Change-Related Loss.”

<sup>95</sup> Matthew Schneider-Mayerson and Kit Ling Leong, “Eco-Reproductive Concerns in the Age of Climate Change,” *Climatic Change: An Interdisciplinary, International Journal Devoted to the Description, Causes and Implications of Climatic Change* 163, no. 2 (2020): 1007-1023,

Considering the ongoing nature of climate loss and the way it disrupts the plans we have for our lives, it should come as no surprise that people respond with feelings of dread and despair. Ironically however, it seems that the same nonfinite quality causing this despair is also contributing to our cultural inability to address it, forcing people to bear the weight of their hopelessness alone. In the next section, we examine the impacts of disenfranchisement further.

### 2.3.2 Impacts of disenfranchisement

In examining the impacts of culturally disregarded grief, Attig calls disenfranchisement a “social failure” that unnecessarily contributes to the suffering of the mourner by forcing them to mourn in private.<sup>96</sup> Making matters worse, Attig suggests that by denying us the opportunity to share our pain, disenfranchisement also denies us the chance to thrive by finding “hopeful paths *through* pain”<sup>97</sup> (emphasis added). Therefore, not only does society fail to recognize the life-shattering reality of loss, it also fails to see the life-giving potential of grief.

The ways that grieving helps us live more fully and authentically is explored in the work of psychotherapist and grief ritual worker Francis Weller. Without minimizing the intense suffering that mark one’s journey through grief, Weller maintains that grieving “is essential to finding and maintaining a feeling of emotional intimacy with life,

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<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10584-020-02923-y>.

<sup>96</sup> Thomas Attig, “Disenfranchised Grief Revisited: Discounting Hope and Love,” *Omega: Journal of Death & Dying* 49, no. 3 (July 2004): 197–215.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 209.

with one another, and with our own soul.”<sup>98</sup> For Weller, grief is not something to avoid or pathologize, it is a process that allows us to live a full life. He explains that grief only “becomes problematic when the conditions needed to help us work with grief are absent,”<sup>99</sup> as is most often the case for climate grief. Other scholars refer to the similar concept of ‘posttraumatic growth,’ suggesting that the process of healing from trauma and loss can often lead to level of transformation and personal growth that was not accessible to the individual before the event.<sup>100</sup>

By contextualizing climate grief as a form of nonfinite and disenfranchised grief, we can predict the lived experience of it is likely to be painful and isolating. While aspects of this pain are inherent to the ongoing losses themselves, much of it would also be a result of our social failure to recognize and support this grief. Thus, in the following section, we turn to grief and loss literature that can help us understand how a healthy and enfranchised grieving process can lead to healing.

### 2.3.3 Worden’s 4 tasks of mourning

A well-known model used to explain the grieving process is Worden’s 4 tasks of mourning. Worden’s model presents grief as a non-linear process in which one does not pass through passive *stages* of grief, but is instead continually supported to take up the various *tasks* of grief. These four tasks include: accepting the reality of the loss (both

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<sup>98</sup> Weller, *The Wild Edge of Sorrow*, xxiii.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Robert A. Neimeyer, “Fostering Posttraumatic Growth: A Narrative Elaboration,” *Psychological Inquiry* 15, no. 1 (January 2004): 53–59.

intellectually and emotionally), processing painful emotions, adjusting to a new reality, and reinvesting emotional energy.<sup>101</sup>

In applying Worden’s model to climate grief, Randall suggests that when it comes to the grieving process, many people, climate organizers included, are stuck at the first task—they have accepted the reality of the climate crisis on an intellectual level but not on an emotional level.<sup>102</sup> She acknowledges that this emotional denial can be functional for a time as it allows “the most painful truths to be assimilated piece by piece”<sup>103</sup> but ultimately suggests that in order for climate grief to be re-enfranchised, people need to move through denial and emotionally accept the reality of the climate crisis.

Like others, Randall points to the importance of having shared spaces to help people emotionally process climate-related loss and move through the tasks of mourning.<sup>104</sup> While Randall’s use of Worden’s model is useful in understanding how experiencing and overcoming denial are important parts of the climate grieving process, it does not indicate how meaning-making, shown to be a crucial part of the grieving process,<sup>105</sup> fits in. This is where the theories of assumptive world and narrative reconstruction prove to be useful.

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<sup>101</sup> William J. Worden, *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy: A Handbook for the Mental Health Practitioner*, Fifth edition. (Springer Publishing Company, LLC, 2018).

<sup>102</sup> Randall, “Loss and Climate Change: The Cost of Parallel Narratives.”

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 123

<sup>105</sup> Christopher Hall, “Bereavement Theory: Recent Developments in Our Understanding of Grief and Bereavement.” *Bereavement Care* 33, no.1 (January 2014): 7–12, <https://doi:10.1080/02682621.2014.902610>; Charmaine Smit, “Theories and Models of Grief: Applications to Professional Practice,” *Whitireia Nursing & Health Journal* 22, (2015): 33–37.

### 2.3.4 Assumptive worlds and narrative reconstruction

The concept of the assumptive world suggests that everyone has their own inner assumptive world made up of strongly held beliefs.<sup>106</sup> Formed by early childhood experiences and attachments, these beliefs tell us how the world functions and what our role in it is, giving us a sense of meaning and coherence.<sup>107</sup> However, when we experience loss, this coherence is disrupted. For minor losses, we can make small adjustments to our assumptive world in order to accommodate the change but severe loss can upend our whole assumptive world, calling even our deepest, core beliefs into question.<sup>108</sup> As Janoff-Bulman explains, these core beliefs often include assumptions that the world is benevolent and people are generally well-intentioned, or that “if we engage in appropriate behaviors, good things happen to us.”<sup>109</sup> Reassessing these core beliefs is incredibly challenging, and Janoff-Bulman suggests that in the process, people will often either label the world negatively (e.g., seeing it as threatening, or meaningless) or label themselves negatively (e.g., as inadequate, helpless, or unworthy) in an attempt to regain a sense of meaning or coherence.<sup>110</sup>

Neimeyer understands this reassessment process as a form of narrative reconstruction, during which we may temporarily take on an inauthentic version of our

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<sup>106</sup> Parkes, “Psycho-Social Transitions: A Field for Study.”

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ronnie Janoff-Bulman, *Shattered Assumptions: Towards a New Psychology of Trauma*, (New York: Free Press, 1992.), 9.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 62.



life story.<sup>111</sup> For example, the negative responses Janoff-Bulman outlines above may become part of what Neimeyer labels a dissociative narrative, which is one that helps restore meaning after a loss, but does so in a way that is considered socially unacceptable or shameful. In the example of climate grief, this could be a misanthropic narrative which makes sense of climate loss by suggesting the earth would be better off without humans.

Neimeyer suggests that in order to develop an authentic narrative, one first must share one's dissociative narrative and the underlying pain.<sup>112</sup> Even though it can be incredibly difficult to give voice to our negative views about ourselves or the world, Neimeyer stresses that "overcoming the personal and relational ruptures associated with dissociated narratives can provide a powerful engine for both personal growth and deeper, more meaningful relationships."<sup>113</sup> Therefore, an honest and shared grieving process allows us to strengthen our relationship to ourselves and to others, helping us reconstruct narratives that may be more meaningful and authentic than the ones we had before the loss. As part of this reconstruction process, Neimeyer suggests exercises like narrative retelling and therapeutic writing,<sup>114</sup> providing further support for the design of my workshop.

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<sup>111</sup> Neimeyer, "Fostering Posttraumatic Growth: A Narrative Elaboration."

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Robert Neimeyer et al., "Grief Therapy and the Reconstruction of Meaning: From Principles to Practice," *Journal of Contemporary Psychotherapy* 40 (June 2010): 73, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10879-009-9135-3>.

## 2.4 Theological Literature

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Returning back to ourselves,  
healing, resurrected

An unwinding outward that is somehow still  
bringing me deeper in,

closer to the core of you

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As discussed above, the fundamental work of grieving is to reconstruct systems of meaning that have been fractured by loss,<sup>115</sup> making it a process in which both spirituality and theology can play an important role.<sup>116</sup> Before exploring spiritual concepts that can help guide the study and treatment of climate grief, I will first give a few examples of how those in the realms of theology and spiritual care have already responded to the climate crisis.

Most broadly, the field of ecotheology refers to theological work focusing on the relationship between humans and the earth and, according to theologian Willis Jenkins, can be understood to include three main currents: stewardship, eco-justice, and ecological subjectivity.<sup>117</sup> Jenkins identifies one particularly relevant stream within the current of

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<sup>115</sup> Robert A. Neimeyer, *Lessons of Loss: A Guide to Coping*, (Memphis, TN: McGraw-Hill Primis Custom Publishers, 2002).

<sup>116</sup> Robert A. Neimeyer and Laurie A. Burke, "Loss, Grief, and Spiritual Struggle: The Quest for Meaning in Bereavement," *Religion, Brain & Behavior* 5, no. 2 (May 2015): 131–38, <https://doi.org/10.1080/2153599X.2014.891253>.

<sup>117</sup> Willis Jenkins, *Ecologies of Grace: Environmental Ethics and Christian Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 31–111.

eco-justice, that of the earth and liberation, a topic developed mainly by womanist theologians of color. For example, Delores Williams characterizes liberation as the “active opposition to all forms of violence against humans... and against the land”<sup>118</sup> while Karen Baker-Fletcher describes God both as a God of liberation and as Spirit in creation.<sup>119</sup>

In addition to those laying the theological framework for understanding humans’ relationship to the earth, are theologians applying Christian language and stories to the discussion of the human response to the climate crisis. For example, Sharon Delgado discusses finding hope in the face of climate change, and suggests a lens of ‘suffering with creation,’<sup>120</sup> while Brooks Berndt proposes using stories from the Hebrew scriptures to help work through the feelings of powerlessness that comes along with facing the reality of climate disaster.<sup>121</sup>

In addition to addressing ecological and climate issues from a theological perspective, there is the potential for the Christian community to address these concerns in the form of spiritual and pastoral care. Panu Pihkala actually frames this as an obligation, arguing that faith communities have a unique capacity to help people deal with the deep questions and profound suffering that come along with facing the reality of

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<sup>118</sup> Delores S Williams, “Straight Talk, Plain Talk: Womanist Words about Salvation in a Social Context,” in *Embracing the Spirit: Womanist Perspectives on Hope, Salvation, and Transformation* (Maryknoll, NY, 1997), 118-119.

<sup>119</sup> Karen Baker-Fletcher, *Sisters of Dust, Sisters of Spirit: Womanist Wordings on God and Creation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Pr, 1998).

<sup>120</sup> 9/15/2021 9:06:00 PM

<sup>121</sup> Brooks Berndt, “Grasshopper Theology: Heading to the Promised Land Instead of Climate Disaster,” *Review & Expositor* 115, no. 3 (August 1, 2018): 412–16, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0034637318783203>.

climate change.<sup>122</sup> Although spiritual and pastoral care practitioners have a long history of providing support during various crises (from acute events like civil unrest or natural disasters,<sup>123</sup> to the ongoing crisis of capitalism itself<sup>124</sup>), there is not yet research on how they can support those struggling from the climate crisis.

Thankfully, this gap in the literature does not mean support is not being provided; many practitioners on the ground have already recognized and begun responding to this need. The term ‘movement chaplain,’ has emerged to describe those offering spiritual and emotional care to the communities organizing against various systems of oppression, including those working within the climate movement.<sup>125</sup> Movement chaplaincy is only one intersection in a growing network of care providers attending to the holistic needs of those involved in social movements—a realm referred to as ‘healing justice.’<sup>126</sup>

Despite these encouraging developments, there remains a deep need for more spiritual support for climate grief. Christian spiritual care providers should be well

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<sup>122</sup> Panu Pihkala, “The Pastoral Challenge of the Environmental Crisis: Environmental Anxiety and Lutheran Eco-Reformation,” *Dialog* 55, no. 2 (2016): 131–40, doi:10.1111/dial.12239.

<sup>123</sup> Larry Kent Graham, “Political Dimensions of Pastoral Care in Community Disaster Responses,” *Pastoral Psychology* 63, no. 4 (August 2014): 471–88, <https://doi:10.1007/s11089-013-0571-3>; Stephen Roberts and Willard W. C. Ashley, eds., *Disaster Spiritual Care: Practical Clergy Responses to Community, Regional and National Tragedy* (Woodstock, VT: SkyLight Paths, 2008).

<sup>124</sup> Ryan LaMothe, “Giving Counsel in a Neoliberal-Anthropocene Age,” *Pastoral Psychology* 68, no. 4 (August 2019): 421–436, <https://doi:10.1007/s11089-019-00867-4>; James N. Poling, “Pastoral Care in a Time of Global Market Capitalism,” *The Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling* 58, no. 3 (Fall 2004): 179–185, <https://doi:10.1177/154230500405800303>.

<sup>125</sup> “Daring Compassion: Role of Movement Chaplaincy in Social Change,” Faith Matters Network, <https://bit.ly/32MaFVO>; For an example see: “Buddhist Eco-Chaplaincy,” Sati Centre for Buddhist Studies, <https://www.sati.org/buddhist-eco-chaplaincy-3/> (accessed April 12, 2021).

<sup>126</sup> Loretta Pyles, *Healing Justice: Holistic Self-Care for Change Makers* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018).

equipped to fill this need because, as explored below, the Christian tradition holds deep insight into the transformative potential of the grieving process. Additionally, literature from the field of Christian spiritual care offers several concepts relevant for climate grief, concepts which can easily be adapted for both multi-faith and secular contexts.

#### 2.4.1 The path of grief as the path of discipleship

In their exploration of grief and pastoral care (a term often used interchangeably with spiritual care), Mitchell and Anderson suggest that the path of grief is inseparable from the path of Christian discipleship—followers of Christ are called to love the world as Christ loved it and therefore to suffer with it, or grieve with it, as Christ did.<sup>127</sup> This can be a difficult calling, but as Mitchell and Anderson point out, Christians can be comforted in their faith that they do not carry this suffering alone. With a God who suffers with them and loves unconditionally, Christians can have confidence to grieve fully, going to the most wounded places in themselves or in others, without being afraid that the pain will devour them or make them unworthy of love.

Upon inspection, this is a radically counter-cultural view of grief. As the authors suggest, “the affirmation that God suffers with us shifts the focus from resolution to mutuality,”<sup>128</sup> framing grief not as an individual burden or problem to resolve, but as *an ongoing way of being in relationship with God and the world around us*. It is through grieving that we are drawn one into authentic, communal relationship with the world. As

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<sup>127</sup> Anderson and Mitchell, *All Our Losses, All Our Grief: Resources for Pastoral Care*.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

Christian scholar Bonhoeffer explains, when someone suffers compassionately with another, they are reminded “how close are the bonds which bind them to the rest of humanity”<sup>129</sup> and therefore reminded of humanity’s shared, communal reality in God.

The Christian Desert Fathers and Mothers (monastics living in 4<sup>th</sup> Century Egypt) understood this relational aspect of grief intimately and actually used weeping as a way of overcoming their alienation from God.<sup>130</sup> According to Burton-Christie, these mystics and monastics “knew that tears could help break open the soul, kindling a deeper awareness of one’s vulnerability and fragility, and one’s capacity for intimacy with God and all living beings.”<sup>131</sup> These early Christians used mourning as a spiritual practice, one that allowed them to both reconnect with their true, communal reality *and* further deepened their capacity for compassion.

The Christ-followers above provide powerful examples of the transformative power of grieving together, showing what it means to both ground oneself in God in order to be able to grieve, and grieve together in order to restore one’s relationship with God and with the world. However, the language used above can be extremely alienating to non-Christians. In the following section, a review of pastoral care literature reveals spiritually inclusive ways to understand the transformative power of grieving. Instead of grounding oneself in God, this literature talks about the importance of being grounded in

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<sup>129</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 1st Touchstone ed. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995), 109.

<sup>130</sup> Burton-Christie, “The Gift of Tears: Loss, Mourning and the Work of Ecological Restoration,” 35.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

a ‘container’ in order to grieve. And instead of surrendering to God in order to heal, we can discuss surrendering to ‘divine momentum.’

#### 2.4.2 The path of grief as the path of healing

In the field of grief work, the word container is often used to describe a safe and structured space in which grieving, and therefore healing, can occur.<sup>132</sup> One of the ways this container can be created is through ritual, which Anderson defines as “a patterned activity with symbolic meaning.”<sup>133</sup> These symbolic activities, anything from lighting a candle to telling a story, help identify the ritual space as set apart, a place with difference expectations from those of day-to-day life. For example, in grief container, you would be invited to express emotion honestly and in ways that may not be seen as acceptable in regular life. As Anderson puts it, “rituals build a fence around our fear and provide a container for honest grief—and honest grief heals.”<sup>134</sup> For Anderson, this healing is particularly powerful in group ritual spaces where individuals can feel intimately connected to both a community and to “a narrative that is larger than the trauma or hurt.”<sup>135</sup> Therefore, by fitting our individual hurt and pain into a much bigger story,

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<sup>132</sup> Hamilton, “Emotions, Reflexivity and the Long Haul: What We Do About How We Feel About Climate Change.”

<sup>133</sup> Anderson, “How Rituals Heal,” 42.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*

shared ritual spaces, and the safe containers they create, help us heal and give meaning to our loss.

Shared ritual spaces are not the only way to create a container for healing and grief. In his book on grief counselling, Wolfelt suggests that the compassionate presence of a counsellor or companion can also create a container or “a ‘holding environment’—a safe place and a cleaned-out heart that stands by ready to hospitably bear witness to and accommodate whatever the mourner thinks and feels.”<sup>136</sup> This cleaned-out heart is one that accepts the mourner just as they are, thereby communicating to them that it is safe to journey to the deeper, more difficult places of grief, precisely where healing is needed most. Like the ritual space, the container created by the companion and the mourner creates the supportive conditions needed for transformation and healing.

Although the concept of the container explains how to *make space* for healing, it does not explain *how* healing itself happens. From a Christian perspective, God provides the energy for healing through the Holy Spirit. However, for those who do not believe in God, Wolfelt’s concept of divine momentum can be useful. According to Wolfelt, it is neither the companion nor the mourner who is ultimately responsible for doing the healing. Rather, within the counselling space a kind of energy that is gained whenever someone meets a need of mourning, an energy that naturally and inevitably draws the mourner into deeper healing. Wolfelt calls this energy *divine momentum* and suggests that to trust in this mysterious process is to trust that “the process of mourning naturally

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<sup>136</sup> Wolfelt, *Counseling Skills for Companioning the Mourner*, 52.



and necessarily leads to healing and reconciliation.”<sup>137</sup> This sense of trust is profoundly important as it allows the mourner to let go of control, which Anderson and Mitchell argue is a difficult but essential aspect of grieving.<sup>138</sup>

Clearly, it is entirely possible to conceptualize using non-Christian terminology a foundation or structure that can help the mourner feel safe enough to grieve. Both the structure and narrative of a shared ritual and the empathetic presence of the companion can provide a container for the process of grief and healing. Additionally, the healing process itself can be articulated as a process of divine momentum, in which the mourner is invited to give up control, trusting that if they go to the difficult and uncertain places of grief, healing can and will happen.

## 2.5 Methodology

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My thesis,  
Crisis after crisis

My own melting brain melting

I’m all spun out now,  
And ready to be woven.

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>138</sup> Anderson and Mitchell, *All Our Losses, All Our Grief: Resources for Pastoral Care*, 101.

### 2.5.1 Climate grief and arts-based research

My research uses the methodology of arts-based research (ABR). This framework allows one to integrate art into any step of the research process—as a data source, as a method of interpretation, or as a medium to present findings.<sup>139</sup> Scholars suggest that ABR is uniquely suited to qualitative research because of its ability to capture nuance, complexity, and emotional depth.<sup>140</sup> This is equally true for qualitative research on climate grief and healing; many studies demonstrate the benefits of using art to express difficult emotions related to climate change, from general arts-based education<sup>141</sup> to drama<sup>142</sup> to writing.<sup>143</sup> Within the ABR framework, my study uses both narrative-writing and poetry writing as ways to express and interpret climate grief.

### 2.5.2 Grief and narrative writing

Writing has been used to address grief and loss in various ways in the fields of psychology and spiritual care. In a seminal study, James Pennebaker demonstrated that

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 407.

<sup>141</sup> Jan van Boeckel, “Arts-Based Environmental Education and the Ecological Crisis: Between Opening the Senses and Coping with Psychic Numbing,” in *Metamorphoses in Children's Literature and Culture*, ed. Barbara Drillsma-Milgrom and Leena Kirstinä (Turku: Enostone, 2009): 145-164, <http://www.naturearteducation.org>.

<sup>142</sup> Anna Lehtonen and Panu Pihkala, “From Eco-anxiety to Hope Through Drama,” in *Beyond Text: Education Research through Creative Practices*, ed. Jeff Adams, (Bristol: Intellect Books, forthcoming).

<sup>143</sup> Hayden Gabriel and Greg Garrard, “Reading and Writing Climate Change,” in *Teaching Ecocriticism and Green Cultural Studies*, ed. Greg Garrard, (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012): 117–29, [https://doi:10.1057/9780230358393\\_10](https://doi:10.1057/9780230358393_10); Elin Kelsey, ed., *Beyond Doom and Gloom: An Exploration through Letters* (Munich: Rachel Carson Center, 2014).

writing about one's own life experiences, especially those that were difficult or traumatic, can have significant healing properties.<sup>144</sup> Since then, many others researchers have documented the power of using writing to address trauma or grief, some focusing on the power of poetry,<sup>145</sup> and others on the importance of personal narrative-writing.<sup>146</sup> Narrative writing in particular has been shown to help with grief by enabling the writer to make sense of complex emotions and restructure the story of their lives, giving coherence and meaning to even the most difficult events.<sup>147</sup>

The field of spiritual care has also made use of writing, with many practitioners using the arts broadly<sup>148</sup> and narrative more specifically<sup>149</sup> as modes of meaning-making in the face of grief and loss. The literature suggests that the power of writing lies in its

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<sup>144</sup> James W. Pennebaker, "Putting Stress into Words: Health, Linguistic, and Therapeutic Implications," *Behaviour Research and Therapy* 31, no. 6 (July, 1993): 539–48, [https://doi.org/10.1016/0005-7967\(93\)90105-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/0005-7967(93)90105-4).

<sup>145</sup> Daniel O. Bowman, Robert J. Sauers, and David Halfacre, "The Application of Poetry Therapy in Grief Counseling with Adolescents and Young Adults," *Journal of Poetry Therapy: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Practice, Theory, Research, and Education* 8, no. 2 (Winter 1994): 63–73, <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF03391438>.

<sup>146</sup> Louise DeSalvo, *Writing as a Way of Healing: How Telling Our Stories Transforms Our Lives* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1999).

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Sally Bailey, "The Arts in Spiritual Care," *Seminars in Oncology Nursing* 13, no. 4 (November 1997): 242–247, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0749-2081\(97\)80018-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0749-2081(97)80018-6); Rachel Ettun, Michael Schultz, and Gill Bar-Sela, "Transforming Pain into Beauty: On Art, Healing, and Care for the Spirit," *Evidence Based Complementary and Alternative Medicine* (2014): 1–7, <http://doi.org/10.1155/2014/789852>.

<sup>149</sup> Suzanne Coyle, *Uncovering Spiritual Narratives: Using Story in Pastoral Care and Ministry*, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2014); Aaron P. Smith and Julia E. Read, "Art, Objects, and Beautiful Stories: A 'New' Approach to Spiritual Care," *The Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling* 71, no. 2 (June 2017): 91–97, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1542305017703126>.

ability to help people find meaning in loss,<sup>150</sup> which many experts understand to be an essential part of the grieving process.<sup>151</sup> In conclusion, it is clear that art and narrative-writing can be powerful tools for both the research and healing of climate grief.

## 2.6 Integration

—  
not to take pain away but to help carry it

you are less alone than  
you ever thought possible  
—

A review of the literature revealed that young people and climate organizers are more vulnerable to adverse mental health impacts from the climate crisis, supporting my selection of young climate organizers as a research population. Additionally, an overwhelming majority of scholars see group processes as being the most effective way to address climate grief, providing justification for my decision to use group workshops. Finally, the research also supported the design of my workshops, showing that both ritual and narrative writing are especially effective tools to aid in the grieving process.

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<sup>150</sup> Charles Anderson and Marian MacCurdy, *Writing and Healing: Toward an Informed Practice*, (Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 2000); Bodil Furnes and Elin Dysvik, “Results from a Systematic Writing Program in Grief Process: Part 2,” *Patient Preference and Adherence* 5, (2011): 15–21, <https://doi:10.2147/PPA.S15155>.

<sup>151</sup> Hall, “Bereavement Theory”; Smit, “Theories and Models of Grief.”

The literature also revealed insights helpful for both parts of my research question: 1) what is the lived experience of climate grief in young climate organizers? and, 2) how can sharing this experience in a group setting lead to healing?

### 2.6.1 What is the lived experience of climate grief?

First, the literature supports the conclusion that climate grief is often an anticipatory, disenfranchised and ongoing (nonfinite) form of grief. For this reason, we can hypothesize that those suffering from climate grief will experience dread when anticipating the future, sorrow that their lives will not be as they had hoped, and feel isolated due to a lack of community support. Additionally, we can expect that climate grief would touch many aspects of their lives and endure throughout their lifespan.

Although some climate grief journeys may be marked by intermittent periods of healthy denial or avoidance, it is more likely that because climate grief is disenfranchised, many people, including climate organizers, will be stuck in a prolonged stage of denial in which they struggle to emotionally accept the reality of the climate crisis. The concept of assumptive worlds can help explain this, suggesting that people struggle to come to terms with climate change because doing so would mean engaging in dramatic reconstruction of one or more of their core beliefs, a process that is very difficult to do without support.

Unable to engage in the reconstruction process fully, individuals struggling with climate grief may resort to labelling the world or themselves negatively, trying to regain a sense of coherence by internalizing blame (e.g., feeling excessively guilty about personal emissions), or by adopting fatalistic or misanthropic beliefs (e.g., human beings deserve

the climate crisis). These beliefs may then become part of an inauthentic and dissociative narrative that is difficult to talk about with others. Finally, we can expect that young climate organizers may also try to avoid emotional acceptance of the climate crisis by distracting themselves with cycles of overwork and burnout.

### 2.6.2 How can the healing of climate grief happen in a group setting?

In response to this question, the literature emphasizes three things: emotional honesty, community, and meaning-making. Learning to identify and express one's emotions around climate grief is an essential first step in the grieving process, but, as suggested above, this can be very difficult. Therefore, in order to feel safe and supported through this process, some scholars suggest the creation of a structured container which participants can trust to hold their grief.

It is in the shared space of the container that healing happens. As various authors suggest, the process of sharing difficult emotions with others is inherently healing because it helps people connect their pain and their story to something bigger, giving it a sense of meaning and purpose. Lastly, according to those experienced in grief work, we can expect that, similar to any other healing process, those who do the hard work of confronting and processing climate-related loss will experience a level of personal growth and deepened sense of meaning that they may not have if the loss never occurred.

## Chapter 3

### Methodology

—  
words—  
clumsy, frail, a fragment  
dragging behind experience like a broken tail

nonetheless, they are the only tool we have for this and,  
when endlessly repeated, will lose  
and find their meaning,

dismantling slowly our outer walls only to  
build new ones inside our heart

And as for you, go  
learn the meaning of the words, I want mercy  
and not justice.

—

#### 3.1 Research Objectives or “*Why would you write a thesis on something so sad?*”

I was asked this question often by others (and occasionally by myself) throughout my research process. Climate grief *is* a sad topic—I relearned this a thousand times during the course of this study. However, this research journey has also been incredibly rewarding. It allowed me to integrate, for the first time in my life, three of the things I am most passionate about: spiritual care, asking questions, and climate work. These three areas translated into my research objectives:

1. as a chaplaincy student, my goal was to understand how spiritual care could play a role in climate grief and healing;
2. as a researcher, my goal was to contribute to an emerging and understudied field of research; and,
3. as an organizer, my goal was to fill a demonstrated need in my community.

With these objectives in mind, I articulated my research question: *How do young climate organizers aged 18-31 based in Edmonton/amiskwaciwaskâhikan, Treaty 6 give meaning to their experience of climate grief?*

- *What is their lived experience of climate grief?*
- *How can sharing this experience in a group setting lead to healing?*

In order to both give participants the opportunity to explore personal and shared forms meaning, and answer my research question effectively, I decided on a group workshop model in which participants could explore meaning by writing their personal stories of climate grief and sharing them with one another. With the writing of personal narratives, I was interested in answering the first sub-question: *What is the lived experience of climate grief?* And with the process of sharing these narratives, I was interested in the second sub-question: *How can sharing this experience in a group setting lead to healing?*



## 3.2 Methodology or “*How do you go about researching something so sad?*”

I incorporated an arts-based research (ABR) methodology in my study, as I believed that creative expression would uniquely capture the deep pain and complexity of climate grief. ABR provided ways to integrate methods from other research frameworks including narrative métissage, poetic inquiry, and feminist qualitative research. As I explain below, each of these frameworks is uniquely suited to help achieve my research objective of offering a meaningful experience for participants and deepening my own understanding of climate grief and its healing process.

### 3.2.1 Arts-based research

As stated above, Arts-based research (ABR) is a diverse and transdisciplinary methodology that incorporates art as an integral part of the research process.<sup>152</sup> Founded on the epistemological assumption that art generates meaning and helps make sense of the world around us, ABR sees art as a unique and powerful research tool.<sup>153</sup> This tool can be integrated into any step of the research process: as a data source, a method of interpretation, or a medium to present or apply research findings.<sup>154</sup> According to ABR researchers and theorists, art can access deeper places of meaning and hold more

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<sup>152</sup> Chilton and Leavy, “Arts-Based Research Practice: Merging Social Research and the Creative Arts.”

<sup>153</sup> Tom Barone and Elliot W. Eisner, *Arts Based Research* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2012).

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

complexity than other forms of communication, making its findings not only more compelling but also more honest and accurate.<sup>155</sup>

I knew climate grief would likely be a difficult topic to study and I predicted that research participants might struggle to put words to their grief and readers might struggle to understand it. Integrating art into the research process helped address this. Narrative writing allowed participants to access deep feelings without having to simplify or reduce them,<sup>156</sup> and it helped elicit empathy in the reader, giving them deeper insight into what might be an unfamiliar concept. In this way, ABR allowed me to offer participants a meaningful experience and more fully capture the depth and complexity of climate grief, supporting me in my research objectives. With ABR as the foundation, I integrated two more art-based research frameworks into my research process: narrative *métissage* and poetic inquiry.

### 3.2.2 Narrative *métissage*

As referred to above, narrative *métissage* is a framework that can be used as both a workshop technique and a research methodology. As a workshop, narrative *métissage* involves “the authoring of individual narratives—personal stories, anecdotes, reflections, poetry, and so on—and then interweaves the individual’s narratives with those written by others.”<sup>157</sup> The creative braiding of these narratives creates a new text, one that is often

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 407.

<sup>156</sup> Finley, “Arts-based Research.”

<sup>157</sup> Bishop et. al., “Narrative *Métissage* as an Innovative Engagement Practice,” 4.

performed out loud.<sup>158</sup> In this way, employing narrative métissage as a workshop technique allowed me to honor the experiences of the participants while also connecting them to a bigger story, helping participants develop both personal and collective meaning.

Meanwhile, when employed as an arts-based research methodology, narrative métissage weaves together multiple narratives, often from both the participants and the researcher, in order to answer a research question.<sup>159</sup> As expanded upon in the methods section below, I constructed this thesis by weaving together participant narratives with threads of my own narrative, shared through poetry, self-reflection, or story. This was done in order to maintain the uniqueness of the individual stories while still capturing their relationship to one another and to a complex and emergent whole. With both a workshop model prioritizing the development of personal and shared meaning, and a methodology emphasizing relationality, narrative métissage was the perfect complement to the theological framework and practical objectives of my research.

### 3.2.3 Poetic inquiry

The second way I integrated art into my research process was through poetic inquiry. Poetic inquiry is a method that incorporates poetry into research, often as a data source, a mode of analysis, or a presentation method.<sup>160</sup> Poetic inquiry allows the

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> Simpkins, “Narrative Métissage: Crafting Empathy and Understanding of Self/Other.”

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

research to honor the depth and nuance of the human experience<sup>161</sup> and is especially well-suited for complex phenomena that prompt questions about meaning.<sup>162</sup> Poetry was used in three ways during the research process: as a method of interpretation, as a self-reflective tool, and as a way to invite reflection on the part of the reader.

As I explain in the methods section, I first used poetry as a way to help me interpret and present data from participant narratives. Second, as described in more detail in research principles, I used self-reflective poetry to gain insight into how my own emotions and experiences might be influencing my research. Lastly, and as you will have seen while reading the thesis, I employed excerpts of my own personal poems to add depth and context to my academic writing. These brief flashes of poetry at the beginning of chapters and sections help introduce new ideas, share some of my feelings on the topic and encourage readers to pause and reflect on their own responses to the material.

### 3.2.4 Feminist research principles

Instead of using validity and reliability, I followed the lead of other qualitative researchers and turned to the concepts of reciprocity and reflexivity as both guideposts and assessment tools in order to maintain integrity in my research. Feminist researcher Lincoln argues that good qualitative research focuses on relationship in two key ways—building a relationship of reciprocity and trust between the researcher and participants,

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<sup>161</sup> Debbie McCulliss, “Poetic Inquiry and Multidisciplinary Qualitative Research,” *Journal of Poetry Therapy* 26, no. 2, (June 2013): 83-114, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08893675.2013.794536>.

<sup>162</sup> Pauline Sameshima, Roxanne Vandermause, Stephen Chalmers, and Gabriel, *Climbing the Ladder with Gabriel: Poetic Inquiry of a Methamphetamine Addict in Recovery* (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2009).

and ensuring a relationship of reflexivity between the researcher and the subject matter.<sup>163</sup> Reflexivity can be understood as the “process of a continual internal dialogue and critical self-evaluation of researcher’s positionality,”<sup>164</sup> including, for example, their social position, political beliefs, linguistic traditions, and immigration status.<sup>165</sup>

Similarly, in the field of narrative métissage research, Hasebe-Ludt et al. focus on the concepts of *relatedness* and *placeness*, both of which they suggest are actually inherent to métissage process itself.<sup>166</sup> According to Hasebe-Ludt and colleagues, the weaving practice of métissage keeps researchers accountable by revealing the way their ‘thread’ intersects with those around it (i.e., their positionality).<sup>167</sup> Thus, the question is not ‘How can we prove the validity or objective truth of our findings?’ but rather, ‘How can we show that the practice of métissage enabled “us to see ourselves, others, and these locations differently yet truthfully?”’<sup>168</sup> Chambers et al. build on this by suggesting that this braided relationality gives the métissage process an inherent credibility because it maintains the integrity of the individual voices while also giving glimpses of an emergent

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<sup>163</sup> Lincoln, “Emerging Criteria for Quality in Qualitative and Interpretive Research.”

<sup>164</sup> Jennifer Mitchell et al., “Who Do We Think We Are? Disrupting Notions of Quality in Qualitative Research,” *Qualitative Health Research* 28, no. 4 (January 2018): 673–80, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732317748896>. 678.

<sup>165</sup> Joan E. Dodgson, “Reflexivity in Qualitative Research,” *Journal of Human Lactation* 35, no. 2 (May 2019): 221, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0890334419830990>.

<sup>166</sup> Erika Hasebe-Ludt, Carleton Derek Leggo, and Cynthia Chambers, *Life Writing and Literary Métissage as an Ethos for Our Times* (New York: Peter Lang, 2009).

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 2.

whole. This process captures both the unified harmony and the fragmentary dissonance defining our shared reality.<sup>169</sup>

Although there is integrity built into the métissage process itself, it was still important for me to ensure the principles of reciprocity and reflexivity in several additional ways. First, I maintained a daily spiritual practice during the process which helped ground me so I could open myself up to ‘suffering with’ participants without being emotionally overwhelmed, as Mitchell and Anderson suggest.<sup>170</sup> This emotional openness and reciprocity was critical to my objectives as it supported a space of healing for participants while also allowing me to understand the experience of climate grief on a deeper level.

Second, I had monthly therapy and spiritual direction sessions during the research process, during which I discussed the ways my life was impacting my thesis work and vice versa. This increased my awareness of my own emotions, allowing me to use them responsibly in my research and maintain reflexivity. Lastly, I wrote self-reflective poems throughout the research process, a practice shown to increase reflexivity in researchers,<sup>171</sup> especially in those working closely with emotionally heavy topics.<sup>172</sup> As

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<sup>169</sup> Cynthia Chambers, Erika Hasebe-Ludt, Dwayne Donald, Wanda Hurren, Carl Leggo, and Antoinette Oberg, “Métissage: A Research Praxis,” in *Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research: Perspectives, Methodologies, Examples, and Issues*, ed. J. Gary Knowles and Ardra L. Cole, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2008), 142–155.

<sup>170</sup> Anderson and Mitchell, *All Our Losses, All Our Grief: Resources for Pastoral Care*, 99.

<sup>171</sup> Laurel Richardson, “Writing: A Method of Inquiry,” in *Handbook of qualitative research*, 2nd ed., ed. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, (London: Sage, 2000) 923–948; Kathleen T. Galvin and Monica Prendergast, *Poetic Inquiry II: Seeing, Caring, Understanding: Using Poetry As and for Inquiry* (Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense Publishers, 2016).

<sup>172</sup> Laura Apol, “Writing Poetry in Rwanda: A Means for Better Listening, Understanding, Processing, and Responding,” *Journal of Poetry Therapy* 30, no. 2 (March 2017): 71–83, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08893675.2017.1266188>.

an example of this, below is a poem I wrote in the lead up to the first workshop:

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**All Our Wells**

Planning to ask nine people to carve their hearts out  
right in front of me. easy, casual, fun

And as for me, I'll stay behind plexiglass,  
clinical, pursed lips, a clipboard

Fortunately/unfortunately, Life  
does not recognize my terms

She hears splashing, half a dozen deep wells  
within me  
boarded up, fenced off

You can laugh but she is coming for you too!  
for all our wells

Hear her coming down the road, pushing a  
wooden cart bouncing with many empty buckets, coming for  
our wells, determined to draw water from  
each

and every  
one.

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Writing this poem helped me recognize two things about myself. First, that I was worried the workshops would be asking too much of participants emotionally and second, that I had been trying to hide from the reality of my own grief. Through writing this poem, I realized these two things were related. Indeed, I was afraid to ask participants to go deep into their pain because I was afraid to go to that painful place in myself. This encouraged me to finally surrender to 'life,' letting her draw water from the wells of grief I had been so carefully avoiding. Then, when it came time to facilitate the workshops, I

was able to share small pieces of this grief with the participants, creating a kind of reciprocal vulnerability wherein I felt more comfortable asking them to share their pain. Therefore, just like my practices of daily prayer and counselling sessions, self-reflective poetry writing helped me maintain relationships of reflexivity and reciprocity throughout my research process.

### 3.2.5 Conclusion

In the above section, I outlined how I was able to effectively conduct research on a topic as new and emotionally complex as climate grief. As the foundation for my methodology, ABR provided the justification I needed to make art a central part of my research process, along with the flexibility I needed to incorporate other research frameworks. Narrative métissage provided a relational way to create both personal and shared forms of emotionally complex meaning; poetic inquiry allowed my research to capture the full depth of this meaning; and finally, reciprocity and reflexivity helped ensure the integrity of the entire process. All together, these systems set the stage to achieve my research objectives of understanding the experience of climate grief in young organizers and working with them to facilitate a healing process within a group setting.



### 3.3 Methods or *“How did you find out what was making everyone sad?”*

#### 3.3.1 Research design

This research project included five stages: literature review, ethics review, recruitment, data collection, and data analysis. The study involved nine participants who took part in two 2.5-hour online workshops and completed a three page follow up survey. After collecting data via workshop transcripts, participant narratives, and survey responses, I analyzed and interpreted the data using methods from qualitative research frameworks discussed above. The findings are presented in this thesis, interwoven with poetry, narrative excerpts, and my own self-reflections.

#### 3.3.2 Recruitment

My research involved nine participants between the ages of 18-31 who had worked as unpaid climate organizers in amiskwaciwaskâhikan (Edmonton, Alberta) for at least six months. I chose this population because of my existing social ties to it and because I knew from personal experience that climate grief was a common experience in this demographic. In order to have enough participants to make several métissage groups, but not so many as to lose a sense of intimacy as a whole group, I chose to have between six to nine participants. I recruited participants by posting on a group messaging platform used by two local climate organizations, inviting those who fit my population criteria. I also asked that people self-select based on whether they felt they had experienced levels

of climate grief or anxiety in the past that inhibited their day-to-day functioning in some way and felt they would benefit from the workshop process.

The group of nine participants who responded fell into a range of ages, gender expressions, experience levels, and backgrounds. Five participants were millennials (born between 1981 and 1996) and four were part of Generation Z (born between 1997 and 2012). Their involvement in climate organizing ranged from 20 months to 6 years. Five participants were settlers born in colonially-named Canada, three participants were from countries in Latin America and one from a country in northern Europe. One participant was residing in another country during the time of data collection though they had previously lived and organized locally. All participants had experience organizing with at least three other people in the group, and I had experience organizing with all of the participants.

### 3.3.3 Workshop and survey design

The data collection stage was made up of two 2.5 hour Zoom workshops (Zoom is an online video conferencing platform) which took place 10 days apart, and one three-page follow-up survey. I decided to leave time in between the workshops to allow processing time for participants, recognizing that because of the disenfranchisement of climate grief, it would likely take time for them to access and make sense of their emotions. For this same reason, the first workshop was focused on identifying and sharing emotions as well as introducing participants to free writing (an exercise of responding to a prompt by writing without stopping or editing for a set period of time). In the second workshop, participants created their narrative with another free write exercise

and then wove them together through the métissage process. The structure of this process was informed by Bishop and Etmanski's work describing a five-step process of "setting the stage, free writing with a writing prompt, offering an example of a métissage, taking time for editing, sharing stories, and closing the workshop."<sup>173</sup>

In line with this five-step process, I 'set the stage' of the second workshop with a grounding exercise (which included the series acknowledgments described in the first chapter) and a group check in question. Then, participants were given a prompt and invited to do a 20-minute free write on their personal experience of climate grief. Next, after seeing an example métissage, participants had 15 minutes to edit their narratives and select the portions they would be comfortable sharing in small groups. From there, in small groups of 2-3, participants shared their stories with one another and wove together strands of their texts to create one final shared piece. In the final step, the groups returned to the main room to perform their narratives for one another and debrief together.

The last part of data collection was the survey. Consisting of three open questions and four closed questions, the survey collected both demographic data (such as age and length of time involved in climate organizing), as well as participant reflections on their experience in the workshops and their desires going forward. The survey was designed to deepen my understanding of the effectiveness of the workshops, provide participants additional space to reflect on and integrate their workshop experiences, and help me

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<sup>173</sup> Kathy Bishop and Catherine Etmanski, "The What, Why and How of Métissage," in *Feminist Adult Educators' Guide to Aesthetic, Creative and Disruptive Strategies in Museums and Community*, ed. Clover, D. E., Suriani Dzulkifli, Gelderman, H., & Sanford, K. (University of Victoria Gender Justice, Creative Pedagogies and ArtsBased Research Group, 2020): 233, <https://onlineacademiccommunity.uvic.ca/comarts/>.

assess what follow up supports were needed. A copy of the survey, as well as workshop outlines and descriptions, are included in the appendix.

### 3.3.4 Data collection

Data was collected from participant narratives, workshop recordings, and survey responses. The narratives of the participants were full of rich descriptions of memories, emotions, and events, and thus offered invaluable insight into the lived experience of climate grief. Meanwhile, the survey responses and recordings of workshop debriefs and discussions captured participant reflections on the workshop process, shedding light on how sharing their experience of climate grief in a group led to deepened connection and healing.

There were two minor inconsistencies in the data collection process. Two participants who made it to the first workshop were not able to attend the second workshop and therefore did not have their experiences of climate grief represented in the narrative métissages. Additionally, two participants did not fill out the follow-up survey, which meant I could not fully capture their reflections on the workshop process. However, due to the size of the group, these inconsistencies did not prevent my study from capturing an adequately wide range of participant experiences and reflections.

### 3.3.5 Data interpretation

#### *Thematic analysis*

I performed a thematic analysis on the data from the narratives, the workshop transcripts, and the survey responses. Inspired by Spiers' and Smith's use of

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)<sup>174</sup> in tandem with poetic inquiry, I conducted thematic analysis by making notes throughout the data review process and then grouping these into themes and sub-themes. Because the participant narratives described the individual lived experience of climate grief, I used the themes generated from them to answer the first part of the research question. Meanwhile, themes generated from the transcripts and surveys were mostly regarding the workshop process itself, offering valuable insight in the second part of the research question.

### *Poetic inquiry*

The second stage of data interpretation involved poetic inquiry. During this stage, inspired by Poindexter's process,<sup>175</sup> I selected phrases and words from each métissage that I felt were the most emotionally powerful and captured some of the essence of the authors' experience, and put them into three separate documents, one for each of the small groups' métissage. Next, I constructed found poems by rearranging these words and phrases into stanzas, separating the distinct phrases either by line breaks or forward slashes in order to maintain some of their original context.

My practice of reflexivity was especially important during this process because, as Poindexter indicates, poetic analysis is subjective and often based on the instincts of

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<sup>174</sup> Johanna Spiers and Jonothan Smith, "Using Autobiographical Poetry as Data to Investigate the Experience of Living with End-Stage Renal Disease," *Creative Approaches to Research* 5, no. 2 (June 2012): 119–37.

<sup>175</sup> Cynthia Cannon Poindexter, "Research as Poetry: A Couple Experiences HIV.," *Qualitative Inquiry* 8, no. 6 (December 2002): 707.

the researcher.<sup>176</sup> As such, I remained aware while constructing these poems whether I was drawing primarily from my own experience or from participant experiences. For the most part, what resulted were poems in which I explored phrases, concepts, and stories present in the narratives through the lens of my own experience. However, two of the found poems had stanzas discussing aspects of my own experience of grief that were not explicitly present in the narratives. Where this was the case, I italicized the text which was based on my experience and note the distinction in my analysis. Additionally, by sending the completed poems to the métissage authors for approval, I was able to ensure none of my poems misrepresented or contradicted their original meaning. Therefore, as others conducting poetic inquiry have noted, the process of poetic inquiry allowed me to narrow in on the concepts most relevant to my research and weave in aspects of my own experience, all while still honoring the meaning present in the narratives.<sup>177</sup>

### *Narrative métissage*

The last stage of data interpretation involved integrating everything through my own narrative métissage process. This involved selecting found poems that complimented some of the themes generated in the first stage and weaving them together, and then using the poems to deepen my analysis of the themes. In some cases, this meant elaborating on the poem for the reader, and in others, I simply let the poems speak for themselves. It is my hope that the lyricism of the poems will provide readers “with a different lens through

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<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> McCulliss, “Poetic inquiry and multidisciplinary qualitative research.”

which to view the same scenery, and thereby understand data, and themselves, in different and more complex ways.”<sup>178</sup>

In addition to weaving together the generated themes and found poetry, I also intertwined threads of my own reflections, poetic responses, or pieces of my narrative throughout the findings. This served several purposes. First, it allowed me to use my own story to go deeper into certain emotional themes instead of overanalyzing the lived experience of a participant. Second, it allowed me to practice reflexivity by making it clear to the reader the ways my own memories, emotions, and experiences were impacting my relationship to the participants and to the data.

Unfortunately, due to space constraints and the scope of my research question, I was not able to include as much of my own narrative thread in the final thesis as I had initially hoped. However, I felt that the *métissage* process itself gave me invaluable theological insight into my research findings, revealing the ways my own experience of climate grief and of healing overlapped with, interacted with, and diverged from those of the participants, allowing me to capture a more dynamic picture of an emergent whole.<sup>179</sup> It was this resulting tapestry of reflections, poems, stories, quotes, and analysis that provided a complex web of relations that allowed me as a researcher to simultaneously stay rooted in *and* transcend my own experience of climate grief.

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Chambers et. al., “*Métissage: A Research Praxis.*”

### 3.4 Ethical Issues or “*How did you make sure nobody got too sad?*”

#### 3.4.1 Confidentiality

Data was stored securely throughout the research process and all identifying details of anonymous participants or non-participants were removed from the data as it was compiled. At the beginning of each workshop, participants were verbally reminded of the confidential nature of the session and asked to agree to refrain from sharing any identifying details or personal stories of other participants. However, because I could not ensure participants did so, the group was also informed that total confidentiality and anonymity could not be completely guaranteed. Lastly, in order to ensure no data ended up in the final thesis that participants were not comfortable with, I performed member checks by requesting participant approval on any sections of the final study that included their data.

#### 3.4.2 Anonymity

When signing consent forms, participants were given four options: to be fully identified, to be identified only as an author of the collaborative writing, to use a pseudonym, or to remain anonymous. Eight participants decided to be fully identified and one chose to only be identified as one of the authors of their groups’ narrative métissage. This created a situation where the partially identified participant could easily be associated with their quotes through the process of elimination. In order to avoid this, in



the final thesis, I only associated the other participants with some of their data, leaving a large number of anonymous quotes and narrative excerpts that could not easily be attributed to either the anonymous or identified participants.

### 3.4.3 Risk

Due to the subject matter and workshop design, certain levels of distress and low mood were accepted as a necessary part of the grieving process. I did identify a small risk of these feelings becoming unmanageable for participants; however, this risk was not deemed to be greater than what the participants would face in daily life as it pertained to the research topic. Nonetheless, every effort was made to mitigate risk by creating a safe environment for participants (e.g., by preparing them for emotions that might arise, reminding them they could step back from the process at any time, providing time for breaks and debriefs, and offering post-workshop support).

The post-workshop support included a list of free and low-cost mental health services, a reference for free online sessions with spiritual care providers, and an optional group check-in two weeks after the workshops. Two participants came to the post check-in session, while two others reached out to me for a one-on-one debrief after a session. I did not inquire, nor did I have any participants tell me, whether or not they accessed the other resources provided.

### 3.4.4 Benefits

The project offered participants an opportunity to gain insight into their own emotions and grieving process and express these emotions in a supportive environment. It

also provided a social benefit due to the opportunity for group bonding between members of the same organization. The scholarly benefits include shedding light on an understudied topic that is quickly growing in relevance, describing the experience of a population vulnerable to climate grief and assessing the effectiveness of collaborative narrative-writing as a spiritual care intervention for climate grief.

#### 3.4.5 Member checks

After completing my data analysis, I conducted member checks where I requested participant approval on the portions of my thesis that included their data. They were invited to respond with any feedback or edits, including requests to remove any part of their data. This was done in order to ensure that my interpretation was true to their experience and that they were comfortable with the way their data was being used. Only one participant responded with edits and several others gave positive feedback, saying they found it meaningful and affirming to read my interpretation of their experience in the context of my research.

#### 3.4.6 Being an insider researcher

There were several ethical implications of my relationship to the participants. I organized with all of the participants in the past—mostly as peers, but for several I had served as an informal mentor. These existing ties made me an ‘insider’ researcher or a ‘complete member researcher,’ and impacted my research in several ways. In some ways, this was beneficial; for example, I understood the organizing context participants were coming from and there was a built-in trust between us. However, this proximity also

posed several risks. One such risk was that because they knew me, participants would feel more obligated to join or stay in the study. To prevent this, I emphasized that people should only volunteer to participate if they felt like they would benefit from it and communicated clearly that should a participant decide to withdraw from any part of the study, neither the success of my research nor my opinion of the participant would be impacted in any way.

A second risk of being an insider researcher with experiential knowledge of the subject matter was that I would project my own associations with climate grief onto the experiences of the participants. To address this, I developed a practice of reflexivity. This included “detailed reflection on the subjective research process, with a close awareness of [my] own personal biases and perspectives.”<sup>180</sup> As I described above, in order to keep this ‘close awareness,’ I wrote self-reflective poems regularly throughout the research process. This regularity led to a “continual internal dialogue” on the ways my positionality and my emotions were affecting my research.<sup>181</sup>

### 3.5 Conclusion

In the previous sections, I covered the design of my research, my intentions behind this design, as well as the ethical implications arising from that design and how I addressed them. By recruiting participants from my own community, I was able to start the workshops with a level of trust built between me and the group but was also required

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<sup>180</sup> Dwyer and Buckle, “The Space Between: On Being an Insider-Outsider in Qualitative Research,” 59.

<sup>181</sup> Mitchell et al., “Who Do We Think We Are?,” 678.

to take several measures to ensure my existing relationship to participants did not negatively impact my research. In using a group workshop model, I was able to provide participants opportunities to create both personal and shared forms of meaning; however, it also meant I had to remind participants that I could not completely guarantee their confidentiality. Lastly, by using narrative and poetic writing to collect and interpret data, I was able to access some of the deeper emotional realms of climate grief but this also required me to be disciplined in maintaining practices of reflexivity. Overall, the design and ethical considerations of my research allowed me and the participants to explore the meaning of climate grief in a way that was safe, ethical, and meaningful for everyone involved.

## Chapter 4

### Findings and Discussion

—  
Loss shows us the world as it is  
  
and dares us  
to love it anyways  
  
Let grief teach you how to live again.  
—

In order to understand how young climate organizers give meaning to their climate grief, my research question addressed two issues: What is their lived experience of climate grief? And, how can sharing this experience in a group setting be healing? For the first part, I draw meaning from the participant narratives and the found poems I constructed using the narratives. Then, to answer the second part of the question, I turn to participant reflections on the workshop process as found in the workshop transcripts and survey responses. Finally, in the discussion section, I integrate these findings and contextualize them within the literature.

#### 4.1 What is the lived experience of climate grief in young organizers?

“What does it feel like to be alive right now?” This was the prompt given to participants for their narrative free write in the second workshop. I encouraged them to follow the writing wherever it led them. This resulted in powerful expressions of love and

grief, mostly on the topic of climate and political grief, but also on more personal forms of loss, such as the loss of a loved one. While reading and rereading the narratives, I applied a thematic analysis and identified six key emotional themes used by participants to express and make sense of their grief: anger/bitterness, fear/anxiety, guilt/self-criticism, hopelessness/despair, resolve/determination, and sorrow/hurt. Paired with each of these is a found poem I created out of words and phrases from the narrative *métissages*, adding depth and emotional nuance to the themes. These poems capture emotions and concepts present in the narratives but interpret them through the lens of my own experience. In two cases, parts of a found poem capture an aspect of my experience *not* necessarily present in the corresponding *métissage*. Where this the case, I italicize the text of the poem and make note of it in my analysis.

#### 4.1.1 Climate grief is made out of anger and bitterness

##### **Found Poem #1: People who didn't listen**

In his late 50s

learning / for YEARS,  
like many shitty older whites,  
that

his / universe  
is  
the universe.

“there’s just nothing we can  
do about it”

but

the clock keeps ticking ticking  
we're all on a boat / on a precipice

we are too far along  
again / and  
for the thousandth time

makes me feel angry and sad,

the way things are is not the way  
they had to be.

Anger seemed to be a connecting point of many of the narratives, often expressed as bitterness, resentment, or rage. The most powerful stand-alone example was in one participant's description of her anger towards "shitty older whites," a demographic she saw embodied in Rick (not his real name), her "mom's friend's 'boyfriend.'"

He knows the climate crisis is real, and he knows people caused it. However, he, like many shitty older whites, think that there's just nothing we can, or even should, do about it. ... These people fill me with rage because by and large they are the ones who got us here. Older people who didn't take the early warning signs seriously enough. ...

Rick has a comfortable life, and seems to live without the rolling waves of climate anxiety that feel like my life force. And so I despise his complacency, his ignorance, his lack of remorse. Fuck that guy.

Initially, the author expresses anger towards the whole generation of people who "didn't take the warning signs seriously enough." However, she quickly reveals her deeper anger is reserved for those who continue to justify this inaction—it is one thing to knowingly let climate change happen; it is quite another to do so without a shred of shame or regret. This lack of remorse feeds into the author's sense of resentment; why

should Rick and his friends get to sit back guilt-free while the author faces constant “rolling waves of climate anxiety”?

In my found poem I dug a little deeper into this anger, intrigued by a line from the author’s narrative, “we’re all on a boat.” There was something about the inclusiveness of the statement that felt tender, as if she was acknowledging (perhaps begrudgingly) that Rick was in the boat as well. I decided to make the phrase follow closely after Rick’s excuse that “there’s just nothing we can / do about it” to highlight that, although many in Rick’s generation seem to have turned their back on younger generations, using pessimism to justify their inaction, young climate organizers refuse to do the same. The line, “the way things are is not the way they had to be,” captures the author’s sorrow at the way the world is and her anger towards those who made it this way. But it also hints at her deep love for the world and for what she knows it *could be*—a better, more life-sustaining place for everyone, including Rick.

#### 4.1.2 Climate grief is made of guilt, regret, and self-criticism

##### **Found Poem #2: Stay on the phone one more minute**

Two years ago I met  
melancolía—

goblins, ghouls, BarrickGold

haunt the halls / of  
spectacular  
fun and profit

We all will die at the end of this river



but

*the bell tolls for  
the scariest part*

*I want to do more*

*I haven't even come close*

Emotions of guilt, regret, self-doubt, and self-criticism were woven throughout the narratives, showing themselves to be an integral part of the experience of climate grief in organizers. Some of the most evocative descriptions of this theme come from one author, Juan, who was 23 at the time of the study and had been organizing for around two years. They describe feeling like they were “suffering from knowing it all and doing none of it. Maybe this is what it means to be an imposter,” they say, “people haven’t figured out that you’re just as lost as they are.” It is as if they can see all the work that needs to be done, but every completed task just further reveals their inadequacy, leaving them lost in a swirling mass of undone work, haunted by the guilt of all they cannot do. “Quarter me and pull me apart,” the author writes, “each one of me will come back to do what one couldn’t.” Towards the end of the narrative, Juan concludes:

Death becomes not a celebration of life, but an autopsy of your actions.  
I didn’t know I was the coroner until I found myself dissecting my failures.  
I am the unjust one.

Using the powerful metaphor of dissection, the author describes grief as a near obsessive process of self-examination and self-criticism, preventing the mourner from

celebrating life. Although deeply compelling, the metaphorical nature of these lines makes it difficult to apply them to the author's lived experience of climate grief.

Therefore, to deepen the analysis, I will weave in a brief reflection on my own experience with grief and guilt.

In the last few stanzas of my found poem, I used phrases from Juan's narrative to both resonate with their feelings of inadequacy and highlight something unique to my own experience—feeling that the scariest part of the climate crisis was not the fact that it would destroy us, but the fact that I was powerless to stop it. In my most intense period of organizing, I remember feeling as if I was on an endless hamster wheel of work, guilt, and self-blame; no matter how much work I did, it never felt like enough. In retrospect, I can see what I was really running from was my own deep fears of powerlessness, inadequacy, and from something I knew but couldn't admit: that nothing I could do would ever be enough.

Of course, I couldn't maintain this pace and quickly burnt out; my work came to a screeching halt and left me with no choice but to face the fact that there was nothing I, or anybody else, could do to stop the climate impacts that were coming. Over time, and through the kind of healing process described in the next section, I was able to start coming to terms with this reality. For me, this meant slowly shifting from defining success in terms of my personal ability to fix, win, and save, to understanding success in terms of collective processes of healing and relationship-building.

Of course, my own journey with guilt and self-blame will be very different from others,<sup>182</sup> but the *métissage* process reveals there are also common threads between our stories. So many organizers I know struggle with these kinds of feelings, and although guilt *can* be a necessary part of the grieving process, I have also seen the ways it hurts people and hurts the movement. I explore this tension in my own reflective poem below, inspired by Juan's narrative and the line, "I am the unjust one."

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<sup>182</sup>As just one example, my positionality as a white woman might have actually allowed me to move away from feelings of guilt more easily because of my social and geographic distance from those experiencing climate impacts firsthand (e.g., people in the Global South, Indigenous communities). In this way, guilt can and should be understood as an important emotion for people of privilege to grapple with in a deep and ongoing way.

—  
Aren't we all  
unjust ones?

won't we all fail, fall short, mess up?  
none of us  
ever / quite / doing / enough  
each  
born into the same web of cruelty,  
woven in tightly, yes, and differently

so please! don't dissect yourself,  
doing the spiders' work for them

gentle, gentle

for your own sake,  
for ours

—

In this poem I reflect on the balance between guilt and grace. In my own journey, it has been essential that I learn to see the ways I am implicated in political webs of cruelty (e.g., white supremacy), owning up when I've fallen short or caused harm. However, it has also been critical that I learn to recognize how I have also been conditioned and harmed by these same webs of cruelty, reminding me that although I am accountable for my mistakes, they do not define me. Rather, I am defined by a much bigger story, one asking us to be gentle and graceful with ourselves and each other.

#### 4.1.3 Climate grief is made of anxiety, fear, and dread

##### **Found Poem #3: Being alive in the world right now**

Yes.

I am alive.  
on a precipice.

I didn't ask for this,  
been here and not here  
for as long as I can remember  
the clock is running out,  
it's going to run out,  
*I wish it would.*

I did not suffer less when I was worried about other things

Many participants made sense of their climate grief by describing it terms of anxiety, often in the form of an urgent sense of worry or dread for the future, or as angst about the meaning and purpose of their life. Two authors linked their anxiety to a sense of urgency, both employing the image of a precipice in their writing. One explained, “I feel like I – we – live on a precipice. Like we’re all on a boat at the top of the wave, hovering nearer or farther to a tipping point.” The other described feeling as if humanity is on a “river that will eventually reach a precipice... I already hear the sound of the water clashing with the rock.” For both, the moment we are in is critical and the work is urgent. They are afraid of what lies beyond this precipice—not as some abstract, distant potentiality, but as visceral, looming, and ever-present reality.

Experiencing the threat of climate change in this imminent way understandably leads to feelings of anxiety. One participant states, “in my body I feel a lot of anxiety. I feel it as waves, sometimes lapping around my ankles, sometimes... sweeping me under. Even though it ebbs and flows, it never goes away.” Though it may shift in intensity, the anxiety is constantly there, underlying everything. Another organizer, Carter, 24 years old, also describes a deep and ongoing anxiety.

To be alive in the world right now feels [like] being stuck in a buffet in a gas station in Nevada, knowing that oblivion is near. There are vast amounts of options, choices, directions, and temptations available, but... each and every one of them is predicated on the fact that you must ignore the world collapsing around you, in order to enjoy the many indulgent splendours.

This author describes the sensation of being paralyzed or ‘stuck.’ How can he go on normally, enjoying life, making plans, and investing in his future, with the constant dread of what is to come? His grief seems to be expressed as an existential and ethical anxiety—is it possible to find joy and meaning in life as you watch the world collapsing around you? Conversely, is it possible to live an ethical life if you ignore it? In my found poem above, I grapple with the weight of some of these questions.

The line in the found poem above, “*I wish it would,*” comes from my own experience rather than the authors.’ The line captures a time when my climate anxiety was so deeply intertwined with my ongoing depression that I struggled to untangle the two. Initially, I blamed my depression on the climate crisis, bitterly feeling, as the poem suggests, that it had forced me onto a precipice I had never asked for. Over time however, I came to the painful realization that “I did not suffer less when I was worried about other things.”

In other words, my depression was about much more than just my climate anxiety, and although neither were my fault, they *were* both my responsibility. Struggling with anxiety and asking questions about how to live meaningfully in the face of suffering, uncertainty, and decline is part of the human condition. I realized that to really start answering these questions and addressing my anxiety, I had no choice but to accept the reality and uncertainty of the world I live in.

#### 4.1.4 Grief is made up of hopelessness, despair, and resignation

##### **Found Poem #4: They Know It's Unfair**

Whether we want it or not,  
we / play a game

Splendour!  
Giant stones!  
Progression and growth!

Ignore the world  
do whatever you want  
What? / the violence?  
It is supposed to happen

Other people were crying, and  
I couldn't feel anything,  
there is no feeling of being alive

More than being scared,  
it's hard to imagine a kind world

Closely related to feelings of anxiety and dread are the emotions of despair, hopelessness, and resignation. Many narratives made sense of climate loss by using apocalyptic language such as “death foretold,” “oblivion is near,” “the inevitable fall,” or by describing a world that is “decaying,” “collapsing,” or “having a heart attack.” These feelings of hopelessness are an important part of climate organizers’ lived experience of climate grief. Some authors discuss shifting between periods of high motivation in which they describe feeling “like we could change the tide,” to times of despair when “the end feels so close that I just need to enjoy the view before the inevitable fall.”

Others describe a kind of heartbroken despair at the immensity of the problem and the future it engenders. One author finds it “hard to imagine a kind future,” explaining that even when he tries, the most “visceral” of images that come to him are those of “systematically induced pain and suffering and death.” He struggles to find his work meaningful in the face of this, suggesting that even “being compassionate has a bitter taste when the need for compassion is growing exponentially.” Echoing some of the sentiments in the section on guilt, the author is plagued by the scale of the problem—how can small acts of compassion mean anything when the problems are getting worse exponentially?

In contrast to this internal struggle with despair, another participant seems to have accepted it with a kind of stoic resignation. She asserts that “the climate crisis is happening whether we want it or not... There’s nothing much we can do other than slowing down the process and making things softer, easier, but at the same time how is that going to help the final outcome?” The author first acknowledges that humans do have the capacity to ‘slow down the process’ of climate change, but then wonders if even this is meaningless in the face of what she sees as an inevitable collapse. Explaining her pessimism, she adds, “I don’t think human existence is that important to Earth and so I’ve pretty much given up on it. Instead of being depressed, the world has its phases and it’s the end of one right as we write.”

#### 4.1.5 Climate grief is made of determination, purposefulness, and feeling called

##### **Found Poem #5: They Can Feel it in Their Gut**

I turned off the taps,  
watching  
smoke curl / bitter / out

the stack  
What do you do when

my father,  
your father,  
the ground,

all / poisoned by  
the same men?

In retaliation,

to fight a fight?  
to hurt more

...

We came home and  
Solidarity,  
she / could smell the smoke

in my hair

when she hugged me

Amidst all these painful emotions discussed above, there were also moments when participants described feeling a strong sense of meaning, often expressed as purposefulness and determination. One author explains that while her grief and anxiety can be “at times, overwhelming, these feelings give me purpose.” Being alive in a broken world makes her angry, but it also “feels like a tremendous opportunity to build the world [she does] actually want to live in.” One of the younger organizers, Mónica, describes the powerful and unifying experience of joining other young people in the Fridays For Future strike movement. Using an analogy of a boat on a river, she writes, “we got together in a canoe and we rowed together. We rowed hard, persistently. We invited other people to row with us and they listened. It felt like we could change the tide.” Mónica also



expresses her deep conviction that “there is a way to shift our course, and arrive at a beautiful lake.” This desire for a better future, and the determination to help build it, was echoed by other participants, making it an integral thread in the story of climate grief in young organizers.

#### 4.1.6 Climate grief is made of sorrow and hurt

##### **Found Poem #6: To Be Alive Right Now**

I've lived only eighteen years  
and

right as we write,  
the world / a buffet in a gas station in Nevada,  
is having a heart attack

Economy crashed,  
the world collapsing,  
money wasn't real

It didn't make sense to use oil  
and in retaliation

they still traded it,  
even there on the ocean floor

I got so mad / visceral  
leaning out of a helicopter with a megaphone, yelling

I guess children don't understand lobbying

We came home and  
I couldn't cry for months,

to fight a fight that feels as if it has been lost hurts

As one of the most fundamental emotions of grief, it was surprising to me that although many narratives expressed sorrow and pain, very few named it explicitly. A notable exception however, can be found in these lines written by Carter: “To fight a fight that feels as if it has been lost hurts. To grow in understanding or compassion is to hurt more.” For me, these lines captured something unique about the grief of those involved in climate work. Anyone taking part in any social movement will need to grapple with possibility of significant loss; however, for those seeking to prevent the worst impacts of climate change, loss is pretty much guaranteed. As the author points out, fighting a losing battle means choosing, time and time again, to open oneself up to being ‘hurt more.’ How does one continue down a path that is certain to break their heart at every turn? Without providing any clear answers, Carter does leave one frayed but hopeful thread hanging at the end of his narrative. He asks,

Are we all just full of grief, grief which can be folded into so many different spaces, and tucked away under so many different distractions, or opportunities

Intentionally or not, Carter keeps the question without any punctuation at the end, leaving the reader hanging on the last word. For me, the lack of closure and the final word ‘opportunities,’ hint at the deep and mysterious potential of grief. As the author suggests, we all have layers of sorrow tucked away within us; what would it mean to bring this pain out, lovingly, from where it is hidden? What would it mean to see that process as an opportunity? In the next section I explore this, answering the second part of my research question by investigating the ways in which drawing sorrow out of its hidden

places helped participants experience a sense of meaningful connection to themselves, each other, and the world.

## 4.2 How can sharing the experience of climate grief in a group setting lead to healing?

—

healing

knitted in a womb, raveled, unraveled, raveled

this time let it stick and see what happens,  
you might just get to the bottom of something

—

The previous section revealed the way participants made sense of their lived experience of climate grief by describing it in terms of six different emotional themes. In the following section, we continue to explore the meaning given to climate grief, but now examine the process of meaning-making itself, which is also viewed as a healing process. I understand healing to be the ongoing experience of meaningful re/connection to oneself, others, and/or something greater. Although participants did not specifically use the word ‘healing’ when describing their experience, they repeatedly emphasized experiences of connection, which led me to conclude that healing occurred for the participants.

In order to understand how the workshop process encouraged meaning-making and healing, I went through all the participant comments (from the workshops and surveys) that pertained to their experience of the workshop, then coded and grouped the

comments into themes. While some of the themes I had theorized beforehand (e.g., the importance of establishing a container), others that came up were new and unexpected (e.g., the significance of listening from the heart). Through this analytic process, I was able to come to the following summary as a response to the question above:

*The workshop provided an intentional, secure space that gave participants the opportunity to move through fear and numbness in order to be present to the pain in themselves and in others, and, in doing so, experience a sense of meaningful re/connection with themselves, others, and/or something bigger (i.e., experience healing).*

In the following section, I break down this summary piece by piece, this time weaving in additional threads of my own personal reflection and narrative (the text with borders) rather than found poetry. Additionally, I begin to tie in certain relevant concepts from the literature on grief and the healing process.

#### ***4.2.1 “The workshop provided an intentional, secure space...”***

In their feedback, participants affirmed that they felt safe and prepared during the workshops and that this was important for their grieving process. The sense of safety seemed to come from the intentionality of the participants and of the workshop design, as well as the characteristics of the group itself. For example, some participants showed up wanting to “think about these things with intention” or gain “a better understanding of

[their] grief and emotions.” Others came with specific issues in mind. One participant shared, “I had a really mind opening therapy session with my therapist and I want to process that with relation to climate grief.” Additionally, the structure of the workshop (e.g., ritual opening and closing, clear group norms) also seemed to help set up this intentional space, leading one participant to comment that she found it easy to share because of how “structured this space was... with the container and everything.”

Another factor that helped the space feel safe was the makeup of the group itself. Several organizers commented that being familiar with, and having similar experiences to, the other participants encouraged them to open up. One of the younger organizers also noted that having already known me as an organizing mentor made her feel like “yeah, I can share this, this is like an older sister figure. These are people I can be open with.”

This was very meaningful for me to hear, both as a researcher and an organizer. As the participant indicated, the relationship between myself and the younger organizers was one of mentorship and friendship—I cared a lot for them and was honoured that they trusted me and glad they felt safe. In this case, it was clear our pre-existing relationship was a benefit to the research process as it encouraged participants to open up.

However, throughout my research process, I was also careful to reflect on less obvious impacts that this relationship might have. One thing I noticed coming up was my own sense of protectiveness over the younger organizers. Although I could not identify a specific time this feeling undermined the integrity of my research, I made sure to keep it in mind as I interpreted their data, not wanting to have it limit my view of them (e.g., by causing me to see their data through a protective or paternalistic lens).

Lastly, participants themselves played an important role in creating a safe environment for one another. One of the younger organizers describes how powerful the group dynamic was for him, saying, “for the first time I felt and understood the meaning of a safe space... our shared struggles and support for each other allowed me to be

vulnerable and open up.” As he points out, a safe space is never theoretical, it has to be experienced to be real. Although I set the theoretical edges of the workshop container, it was the embodied vulnerability and compassion of participants that created the contents of that container—a shared system of support that held each of them safely.

This finding supports Hamilton’s work on the importance of establishing a container when facilitating groups focused on climate and environmental-related loss.<sup>183</sup> It also aligns with spiritual care literature suggesting containers for grieving and for healing can be created through group ritual<sup>184</sup> and through the compassionate presence of the other.<sup>185</sup> As explored in the next section, this safe and compassionate container is important as it allows the mourner to move through fear and numbness and begin to grieve.

#### 4.2.2 “The workshop provided an intentional, secure space that *helped participants move through fear/numbness ...*”

As a result of the safe and intentional space created, participants reported they were able to move through feelings of fear and numbness, a step proved that to be critical in the healing process. One participant described her fear and apprehension coming into the second workshop, “I’m a little bit nervous because I remember how emotional the last time got... and I’m wondering what’s going to come up.” Her comment suggests that part of the fear of grieving with others is the fear of not knowing what emotions will ‘come

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<sup>183</sup> Hamilton, “Emotions, Reflexivity and the Long Haul.”

<sup>184</sup> Anderson, “How Rituals Heal,” 42.

<sup>185</sup> Wolfelt, *Counseling Skills for Companioning the Mourner*,” 92.

up' in oneself. A comment from a different participant sheds light on why this might be. He shared that being emotionally vulnerable during the workshops actually contributed "to a lot of negative self-talk," hinting at the way our culture can cause people (especially those raised as boys) to internalize harmful beliefs around emotional expression, often equating it with weakness. This socialization can lead to a fear of 'letting oneself go' emotionally, and harsh self-criticism when one does show vulnerability. (This participant's comment may also point to the need for additional supports within the workshop to help participants deal with this kind of internal criticism.)

In addition to fear, many participants also discussed overcoming a kind of emotional numbness during the workshops. One participant described an "emotional tidal wave," telling the group, "I'm definitely realizing that I've been pushing these emotions away and I didn't even know until we sat down today... I'm feeling a little overwhelmed. But also, in a good way. Also, in a really bad way." These insights suggest that organizers can numb themselves to the emotional aspects of their work without realizing it. This can lead to feeling 'overwhelmed' by emotions that rush to the surface as soon as they have a release valve, which, as the participant mentions, can be both painful and liberating.

Another participant had a similarly painful experience. He shared with the group his sudden realization that he had been resorting to "a detachment of self" to cope with his grief. As he shared this he appeared visibly upset, suggesting that what was most painful to him in that moment was not his climate grief itself but rather, his feelings of being *disconnected from that grief*. His response demonstrates that although we use it to avoid pain, numbing can cause its own kind of hurt.

Comments from two other organizers gave further insight into the damage numbing can do. Laura shared that although grief was painful, it was, in her mind, “a lot better than feeling nothing.” She described her own realization that by numbing the pain of grief, she was causing it to instead be expressed as rage, which in turn was making her behave in ways that were not “in line with [her] values.” Like the others, Laura was emotional as she shared this, upset to realize how disconnected she had been from her own moral and emotional center.

Lastly, Mónica, one of the younger organizers, also described an experience of disconnection. She shared her realization that in order to numb the pain of loss, she had also numbed her feelings of love for the earth, because that love was “one of the reasons [climate-related loss] hurts so bad.” Although she knew that opening herself back up to loss would hurt, Mónica expressed her deep belief that it was worth it. “It’s good to feel the good stuff,” she shared, “to feel connected to other people and to the planet and the birds and everything that’s alive.”

I found myself constantly amazed and in admiration of the emotional maturity of the younger organizers. They were only 18-19 years old at the time of the study and expressed a level of self-awareness and emotional insight far beyond what I remember having at that age. Part of this was beautiful, but I was also aware of the ways the climate crisis had likely forced them to grow up too fast.

Their generation has been coming of age during an incredibly critical and volatile time in history, burdening them with heavy feelings of responsibility and forcing them to grapple with profound loss and intense ethical questions at a very young age. For me, this represents one of the many intangible losses resulting from the climate crisis. By no choice of their own, the many young people impacted by this crisis (either directly or indirectly) have had the opportunity for a carefree youth stolen from them.



4.2.3 “The workshop provided an intentional, secure space that helped participants move through fear/numbness in order to *be present to the pain in themselves and in others ...*”

Once they got past fear and numbness, participants were finally able to do the difficult work of holding pain. Within the safe container of the workshop there were various smaller containers, or entry points, giving participants the opportunity to be present to pain—their own as well as others. These entry points included the exercises of sharing from the heart, listening from the heart, the free write, and the métissage process. Participants gravitated to different exercises, but regardless of which one it was, they were invited to surrender control, letting their hearts remain open and present to pain and the shifting emotions of grief.

*Sharing from the heart*

The first entry point for grief was the invitation to share from the heart (rather than the head) during the ‘circle process’ or sharing circle that closed out both workshops. Although several people commented that sharing from the heart felt difficult and new to them, they also seemed drawn to this invitation, with many deciding to not rehearse their answers beforehand so they could speak more spontaneously. One describes the experience this way:

I'm trying to let my heart speak so it's kind of weird. Right now, my mind is trying to think how can I do this and how can I do that. What should I do to change this and change that and... my heart is just like, ‘breathe, live this moment with everyone here.’

For this participant, sharing from the heart was a process of slowing down in order to be present to her emotions and to the moment as it was, instead of trying to ‘do’ or ‘change’ something. And although this process was somewhat intentional (“I’m *trying* to let my heart speak”), it also seemed to be a process of surrender, as if her heart had just been waiting for the invitation to speak. Another participant reflected on the idea of surrender in her survey response.

[Sharing from the heart] felt honest and real in a way that could not be replicated if we were told to rehearse our answers and not be present in the moment. It may have felt unpolished... but even if it was less structured, I felt as though it pointed more to the core of what we felt.

For this participant, giving up control by being ‘less structured’ and less rehearsed, allowed her to be present to a more real part of herself. This process connects back to the spiritual care literature. As Anderson and Mitchell suggest, letting go of control is the only way the mourner can be present to their pain and express it honestly, making surrender an essential part of grieving.<sup>186</sup> Wolfelt’s notion of divine momentum expands on this. According to Wolfelt, being present to our pain in the presence of a safe companion opens us up to divine momentum, that is to say, an energy that inevitably guides the mourner into deeper healing.<sup>187</sup> In this sense, being present to our pain and ‘letting our heart speak’ is a way of letting go of control and allowing divine momentum to guide us to the wounded places where healing is needed most.

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<sup>186</sup> Anderson and Mitchell, *All Our Losses, All Our Grief: Resources for Pastoral Care*, 101.

<sup>187</sup> Wolfelt, *Counseling Skills for Companioning the Mourner*, 92.

### *Listening from the heart*

I expected sharing from the heart would be a powerful experience, but I was surprised by how many participants found listening from the heart equally transformative. In the very first sharing circle, one of the earliest people to share did so in a very honest and vulnerable way, at times struggling to speak because of the intensity of his emotions. Afterwards, several other participants expressed their emotions physically as well, by shedding tears or speaking as their voices broke. The following session, one of the latter participants thanked the first participant, saying, “I feel like you being vulnerable ... has been such a model for me in terms of being able to open up in that way. And I felt really blessed, like really thankful to be able to witness that and have it hit me as well.”

In expressing her gratitude so sincerely, this participant captured the profound gift offered by the first participant. Not only had he set a precedent that made others feel safe to express emotion, he also, as the comment above indicates, modelled those emotions so that those who were listening from the heart could experience his pain with him, and in doing so, have their grief ‘hit’ them as well. In other words, being present to *his* pain helped other participants be present to *their own* pain, suggesting that listening from the heart allowed participants to connect more deeply with themselves and experience a form of healing.

### *Free write*

While listening and sharing from the heart were group experiences, the free write offered participants a chance to be present to their emotions in a more introspective way. Many said they found the writing process helpful, enjoyable, and surprisingly easy. One

participant shared that it “felt really good to just kind of get into the flow” of writing that was “not for work [or] anything else.” Like the other entry points, the free write invited participants to give up their need to control outcomes, and instead give themselves over to the creative ‘flow’ of their own emotions. Several participants mentioned how surprised they were by where their writing took them; one participant sharing, “I went into it like, ‘I would never write poetry,’ and then I was writing poetry whether I wanted to or not!” and another sharing they wrote “something completely different” than what they had expected. In surrendering control, participants were able to be present to whatever their hearts needed to express, and, as is clear when reading their final narratives, this allowed them to access profound, and sometimes painful, truths about their personal experiences of grief.

#### *Narrative métissage process*

The final entry point was that of creating and sharing the group métissages, an exercise that many participants named as one of the most powerful parts of the workshop. The process seemed to help the group be present to one another’s pain by bringing them to surprising and meaningful points of narrative alignment. One participant shared how hearing the metaphors others used in their narratives helped her feel closer to her own grief, giving her “new perspectives to how [she] view[s] these experiences of loss.” Another participant found that while listening to the other groups perform, the honesty and vividness of the narratives allowed him to “get very close to” the pain of others in a powerful and transformative way.

Lastly, one participant commented that how sharing her métissage piece allowed her to share her pain with others, in a way that was healing. She had written about her relationship with her late father and after discussing the importance of keeping his memory alive, told the group, “it’s obviously hard [to share this] but... it feels nice to know that you can all also hold a piece of my dad as well with you all going forward.” In knowing others were being present to her pain and receiving her story, this participant felt a healing sense of connection. This shared experience also demonstrates the reciprocity of healing. Although the witnesses *gave* the gift of attention to the participant, they also *received* the gift of her story. In sharing a bit about what it was like to lose a parent, this participant (and another who shared about losing her mother) modelled to the others what healthy grieving can look like, an invaluable lesson for other young people facing their own story of loss.

#### *What didn't work*

Due mostly to oversights on my part, there were times when participants wanted to be present to their pain, but felt unable to. The clearest example of this was when a participant (for whom English was a second language), shared that they struggled with the free write, telling me, “because you were talking length of writing, and the amount of words... that literally made me freeze.” I realized that in suggesting a word count for the free write, I did not make it sufficiently clear that it was a suggested *limit* rather than an expected *length*. Another participant also shared the word count had caused some anxiety, preventing them from being fully present to the process. As an anglophone who finds it easy to write quickly, I failed to consider the diverse experiences of participants.

To address this in the future, I will make sure to encourage those who prefer to write slower, or to write in a language other than English, to do so.

4.2.4 “The workshop provided an intentional, secure space that helped participants move through fear/numbness in order to be present to the pain in themselves and in others, ***and in doing so, experience a sense of meaningful re/connection with themselves, others, and/or something bigger (i.e., healing).***”

As discussed in the literature review, experiencing loss causes fractures to our assumptive world.<sup>188</sup> If the loss is big enough, it destabilizes our world by disconnecting us from the things that previously gave us meaning (e.g., a sense of identity, security, or purpose, our plans for the future, etc.). Therefore, the act of healing from loss is a process of going to the fractured places in ourselves to find reconnection, wholeness, and meaning. It is not surprising then, that the words ‘connect’ and ‘reconnect’ came up often in the workshop transcripts and survey responses. The data analysis of these comments and responses revealed that participants were experiencing meaningful connection on three levels: internal, interpersonal, and collective. Further analysis suggested that although each of these levels was significant, it appeared that collective connection had the strongest impact on healing.

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<sup>188</sup> Parkes, “Psycho-Social Transitions: A Field for Study.”

### *Re/connection with ourselves*

As explored above, many participants realized during the workshops how numb they had been. While it was painful to learn how disconnected they had been from certain moral and emotional parts of themselves, moving beyond that numbness also seemed to provide a positive experience of reconnection. One participant said, “it was good to kind of get through that shell” of numbness; another shared that it was overwhelming “in a good way.” Not only did being present to pain help participants reconnect with their emotions, it also helped them gain self-insight. As one participant put it, “expressing [my] own intimate thoughts” in community “gave me a chance to reflect on myself and how my emotions tie together.” The meaning participants seemed to find in this deepened sense of self-awareness and connection aligns with other studies on climate grief. For example, Ojala outlines the ways that gaining awareness of one’s own inner emotional life helps young people find meaningful ways to deal with climate-related losses.<sup>189</sup>

### *Re/connection with others*

In the follow up survey, almost every participant mentioned that the workshops helped them feel more connected to the group, with several referring to this as the most powerful part of the entire process. Although most already knew each other, sharing this experience helped them feel, as Mónica, put it, “connected on a whole other level.” For Mónica, some of this came from discovering narrative alignment within the group. She realized that everyone had a shared “purpose for organizing,” a purpose that turned out to

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<sup>189</sup> Ojala, “Regulating Worry, Promoting Hope.”

be “deeply rooted in grief.” Comments from other participants expressed similar sentiments, suggesting that sharing their narratives and their grief helped the group bond in a unique and powerful way.

Incidentally, the bond that participants experienced might have been particularly healing for those struggling with the alienation of the COVID-19 pandemic; one participant shared that the workshop helped her “feel more connected, which [she] kinda miss[ed] during this pandemic.” It was clear the experience of grieving together was profound for many in the group. After discussing how powerful it was to talk about things she normally “just dealt [with] alone,” one of the younger organizers summarized her feelings towards the group, “yeah, I feel a lot of love, that's what I'm feeling.” These findings confirm the apparent consensus among climate grief researchers that grieving together in a shared, safe space is one of the most powerful ways to facilitate healing.<sup>190</sup>

*Re/connection with something bigger*

Lastly, participants reported an increase in feelings of connection to something that transcended the group, either the local climate organizing community, the liberation movement, or the world itself. For many, this sense of connection aligned with a deepening sense of purpose and belonging, along with a deepening resilience in the face of despair. One of the younger organizers reported a “feeling of connectedness” to the local organizing community during the workshops and a confidence that she would have

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<sup>190</sup> Randall, “Loss and Climate Change: The Cost of Parallel Narratives”; Gillespie, “Climate Change Imaginings and Depth Psychology”; Gillespie, *Climate Crisis and Consciousness*; Kretz, “Emotional Solidarity”; Cunsolo Willox, “Climate Change as the Work of Mourning”; Nairn, “Learning from Young People Engaged in Climate Activism.”



their support if she ever needed “to step back and grieve.” The same participant remarked that knowing this helped combat her feelings of anxiety and despair, suggesting that feeling connected to a wider community helped to make the pain of grief more bearable.

Similarly, other participants felt more equipped to face loss thanks to a deepened sense of connection to a larger, global community. In the first workshop, Laura shared that remembering the “large project” of liberation and the way “it’s motivated by a love for the world and each other” helped contextualize and give renewed purpose to her own work, which lately had been feeling like it was full of “dead ends” and “endless loops of Zoom meetings and Slack channels.” This insight was picked up by another organizer, Carter, who had also been struggling to find meaning in his work. He shared that it was affirming to have Laura remind him of the shared purpose on “the Left...behind the fights that we are fighting,” which as Laura had pointed out, was one of compassion. This renewed sense of connection to a fight bigger than their individual fight and a purpose bigger than their individual purpose seemed to help both participants feel better prepared to face the pain and frustration of loss going forward.

Finally, some participants discussed how the workshop reminded them of their deep connection to the earth itself. After the first free write, Mónica shared, “I came to one thing that I didn’t notice before... it’s like I really love the earth... and being in natural spaces... makes me feel really connected.” Another of the younger participants, Yara, expressed similar feelings of connection to the earth and added that this sense of belonging allowed her to have “peace of mind,” even while feeling “helpless and powerless.” She concluded, “feeling one with everything feels good and it feels right even if the future is not certain.” Yara’s strong sense of belonging to the earth seemed to

give her resilience, helping her feel more equipped to deal with the pain of uncertainty, powerlessness, and loss.

Together, these examples suggest that feeling a connection to something bigger, whether it was to the wider organizing community, the liberation movement, or to the earth itself, helped participants feel like they could face the reality and pain of grief.

### *Facing the pain of loss*

Discovering how connection to something bigger helped participants feel more able to face the pain of loss is a particularly significant finding and worthy of further reflection. Although it is hard to know for certain which aspects of my workshops were most influential in this regard, the focus on narrative likely played an important role. As Anderson's work theorizes, it seemed that by sharing their narratives (either through the *métissage* process or the circle process) in a safe, shared container, many participants were drawn into "a narrative that is larger than the trauma or hurt."<sup>191</sup> It was this shared narrative, bigger than the individual and bigger than the group, that provided participants the sense of meaning, support, and purpose they needed to feel more able to face the pain of loss going forward. This is especially important as it is these feelings of resilience that make organizers more open to reengaging with the world. In Worden's model of grief, this openness is referred to as the ability to reinvest emotional energy, and is an indicator of significant progress and healing.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> Anderson, "How Rituals Heal," 46.

<sup>192</sup> Worden, *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy*.

Lastly, this finding offers an important contribution to climate grief research, adding to processes other researchers have identified as helping to build resilience in organizers. Ojala points to meaning-making as a process that helps organizers face the pain of grief, explaining that it generates positive emotions which “coexist with negative emotions and work as buffers, helping people confront the sources of their worry.”<sup>193</sup> Meanwhile, Gillespie emphasizes shared grieving as the process that helps climate organizers and activists build resilience by helping them look to the future with more curiosity and less fear.<sup>194</sup> My findings add clarity to these conclusions, suggesting that the processes of meaning-making and shared grieving may build resilience *best* when they allow participants to connect with, and find meaning in, a narrative that goes beyond the boundaries of the immediate group. Therefore, in order to fully support the healing process of organizers, it is critical to create a space that not only encourages connection within the group, but also encourages connection to something *beyond* the group.

#### 4.2.5 Conclusion: How did sharing their experience in a group setting lead to healing?

—  
Dusk is already  
a half-formed prayer about frailty, the fall

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<sup>193</sup> Ojala and Bengtsson, “Young People’s Coping Strategies Concerning Climate Change,” 910.

<sup>194</sup> Gillespie, *Climate Crisis*.

the way our spirits  
pour into each other

we just remembered  
none of us can be perfect on our own  
—

As explored in the findings above, by offering an intentional, secure space, the workshops helped participants move through fear and numbness in order to be present to the pain in themselves and in others. In doing so, participants experienced healing in the form of a meaningful sense of connection (or reconnection) with themselves, others, and/or something bigger.

Although all three levels of connection proved to be meaningful sites of transformation for participants, it was the last one that seemed to offer the most healing. Participants that felt like they were part of something bigger than themselves—whether it was the community, the liberation movement, or the world itself—seemed to feel more equipped to deal with the pain of loss. They trusted that even if they got overwhelmed or burnt-out by grief, their community would be there to hold them. They trusted that even if they lost a campaign, or arrived at a dead end, they would still be part of a much bigger project for liberation. Lastly, they trusted that even in the face of an uncertain future, one they often felt powerless to control, they would always be embedded in a world that held them and sustained them. Being part of these larger communities provided participants with a narrative that gave meaning to their individual stories of loss, reminding them they

did not carry their pain, or face an uncertain future, alone.

I found it hard while writing this thesis to strike the right balance between focusing on what is life-giving about grief, while also acknowledging how brutal and painful it can be. Reading back over this last section, I worry that it sounds like I think I can tie up the threads of climate grief neatly. This is not the case. While I do hold a deep faith in our innate human ability to move towards healing, I also believe that there are aspects of human suffering that will never make sense, aspects that will never fit easily into any definition of healing. I end this section with a poem I wrote after the second workshop which reflects on this difficult idea.

—

For the first time I feel  
the weight of it, as if

up till now I was swimming  
in a puddle thinking it was the sea

suddenly,  
skin on my neck catches wind,

Magnitude,  
the Ocean

heavy and thick and endless oh god  
I wish it wasn't but

the tide is coming in

—

Going into the second workshop I was under the illusion that after a year of studying it, I had a good emotional handle on climate grief. But after listening to the participants, all people I cared deeply for, share their own heartbreaking stories, I came away feeling very, very heavy. In writing the poem above, I realized what had hit me was how unimaginably big climate grief really was. So many people were already hurting so deeply and as the climate crisis escalated, there would be only more and more grief. I

knew this was precisely the work I had signed up for but in that moment, it all felt incredibly scary and overwhelming.

Even worse was the realization that in the face of all this pain, there was hardly anything I could really do to take away anyone's suffering, even those close to me. This was (and will continue to be) a hard lesson for me. But I am starting to understand that an important part of grief work is holding space for the true depth of suffering, my own as well as others', honouring the pieces that simply cannot be made sense of in any way. Healing does not have to be about taking away or explaining suffering. It can be about *seeing* fully the broad and deep reality of suffering, recognizing our powerlessness in the face of it, and finding a reason to go on anyways.

### 4.3 Discussion

—  
what would it mean to not fill  
space with chatter

not rush over pain or worse,  
with silence, make them tell you  
it's not so bad really

wish I could be right right there anytime someone I love  
pulls the hem even a quarter inch above  
the rough edge of their heart

I love them dearly,  
much too much to endure

little wound in you  
little wound in me  
the deeper we go it's all the same wound maybe

—

In the findings above, it is clear that even amidst the diversity and uniqueness of individual narratives, six main themes emerged describing how participants experienced and made sense of their climate grief: anger/bitterness, fear/anxiety, guilt/self-criticism,

hopelessness/despair, resolve/determination, and sorrow/hurt. Subsequently, an analysis of workshop transcripts and survey responses revealed that by providing an intentional, secure container with opportunities to be present to pain, participants were able to make meaning through the experience of connection on multiple levels.

In some ways, these results are encouraging; for one, it seems that in relatively simple ways, spaces can be created where organizers can begin to express and give meaning to their climate grief. However, if we contextualize these findings, drawing in concepts from the broader literature, it becomes clear they also expose several deep problems. Mainly, there are serious issues with how climate grief is dealt with in our culture and this appears to have a deeply negative impact on the ability of organizers to grieve in a healthy way.

#### 4.3.1 Disenfranchised grief and nonfinite loss

My findings affirm the conclusions of other researchers who have categorized climate grief as disenfranchised or, in other words, a form of grief not culturally recognized as valid.<sup>195</sup> Throughout the workshops, several participants mentioned they very rarely had opportunities to talk about their climate grief, while others expressed frustration at the inability of the public to face the reality of climate-related loss. This indicates a culture that does not adequately recognize climate-related losses or provide spaces for people to grieve them.

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<sup>195</sup> Cunsolo and Ellis, "Ecological Grief as a Mental Health Response to Climate Change-Related Loss."

One reason climate-related losses are not recognized may be because they are often nonfinite. As explored in the literature review, nonfinite loss refers to an ongoing loss that disrupts one's expected life trajectory, requires constant accommodation, and often causes feelings of hopelessness and dread.<sup>196</sup> All three of these characteristics were present in my findings. Throughout the study, participants repeatedly referenced the ongoing nature of their grief, discussing both past, current, and anticipated climate-related losses. They also described the way climate change casts a shadow over their futures and life choices, expressing feelings of dread, hopelessness, and even resignation over what they understood to be the endless and accelerating nature of these losses.

Additionally, consistent with literature on both disenfranchised grief and nonfinite loss, participants often found it challenging to both identify climate-related losses and name and express their emotions around them. Nonfinite losses can be hard to identify (and grieve) because they are often based on imprecise or uncertain phenomena such as missed opportunities, unfulfilled potential, and anticipated future events.<sup>197</sup> Disenfranchisement likely makes identification even harder as participants would have had few, if any, cultural examples to model themselves after and almost no opportunities to practice naming and expressing their grief. The lack of public acknowledgment and collective spaces for climate grief does not mean that participants' grief went away. Rather, they were forced to cope with it on their own, in ways that often ended up doing more harm than good.

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<sup>196</sup> Harris and Winokuer, "Living Losses: Nonfinite Loss, Ambiguous Loss, and Chronic Sorrow," 125.

<sup>197</sup> Schultz and Harris, "Giving voice to nonfinite loss and grief in bereavement," 241.



### 4.3.2 Numbing, avoidance and self-blame

The literature suggests that the negative implications of disenfranchisement can be severe,<sup>198</sup> and my study shows that climate grief is no exception. I found that without opportunities to grieve communally, research participants resorted to individualized coping mechanisms such as numbing, avoidance, and internalized blame, all of which appeared to cause significant distress.

As explored above, many participants resorted to numbing their climate grief. Their response to this numbness affirms research suggesting that although avoidance, denial, and numbing can be useful in the short term (as they allow us to process the reality of loss gradually instead of all at once),<sup>199</sup> if they persist for too long, they no longer help with the problem, they *become* the problem. Participants reported their numbing to be harmful in various ways, either leading to a “detachment of self,” causing behaviour that was not in line with their values, or disconnecting them from their feelings of love for the natural world. When discussing these impacts, participants often became visibly upset, suggesting that this strategy can cause deep and painful fractures in one’s sense of self.

A second coping mechanism hinted at in the findings was avoidance, or more specifically, using organizing work to avoid difficult emotions. In the follow-up survey, one participant reflected on how organizing work could be a “coping mechanism” that acted as a placeholder for the deeper “grief work,” a strategy he suggested could lead to

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<sup>198</sup> Attig, “Disenfranchised Grief Revisited: Discounting Hope and Love.”

<sup>199</sup> Randall, “Loss and Climate Change: The Cost of Parallel Narratives,” 122.

burnout. This comment aligns with research exposing high rates of overwork and burnout in young climate organizers,<sup>200</sup> which could be the result of organizers unconsciously trying to numb the pain of loss through manic activity.<sup>201</sup>

Manic overwork might also be a result of the last coping mechanism: the tendency for organizers to internalize blame for the climate crisis. As explored in the first part of this chapter, some participants struggled with intense feelings of guilt, inadequacy, and self-criticism—no matter how hard they worked, it never felt like enough. Looking at Janoff-Bulman’s argument that people view themselves negatively after a loss as a way of restoring coherence to their assumptive world without having to reevaluate certain core beliefs,<sup>202</sup> we could understand the self-criticism of participants as a way of making sense of climate-related loss. (This process is explored in more detail in the case study below.)

In summary, as theorized by Randall,<sup>203</sup> young climate organizers can often accept the climate crisis on an intellectual level, but not on an emotional one. However, it appears that this is not so much a conscious choice as it is an emotional necessity—without any of the collective spaces necessary to deal with their climate grief, organizers are forced to deal with the pain individually. This results in them detaching from their emotional selves, distracting themselves with their work, and directing their pain and

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<sup>200</sup> Nairn, “Learning from Young People Engaged in Climate Activism.”

<sup>201</sup> Randall, “Loss and Climate Change: The Cost of Parallel Narratives,” 123

<sup>202</sup> Janoff-Bulman, *Shattered Assumptions: Towards a New Psychology of Trauma*, 62.

<sup>203</sup> Randall, “Loss and Climate Change: The Cost of Parallel Narratives.”

frustration inwards in the form of self-criticism, all of which can eventually cause significant emotional distress and burnout. These findings confirm Narin's conclusion that climate activists feel significant pressure to deal with their emotions independently, often to their own detriment.<sup>204</sup>

### 4.3.3 Narrative reconstruction case study

As the discussion above lays out, the disenfranchisement of climate grief is very harmful to the grieving process of young organizers, making the need for spaces like this project's workshops clearer than ever. To further demonstrate the unique value of these shared spaces for grief, and to tie in several additional threads from the literature on grief and healing, we now turn to a case study. This study investigates how workshops helped one participant in a process of narrative reconstruction and healing.

Above, I discuss healing in terms of experiencing a meaningful reconnection to oneself, to others, or to something bigger. However, it is also helpful to conceptualize healing in terms of Neimeyer's concept of narrative reconstruction.<sup>205</sup> In this model, grieving a severe loss is a process of rebuilding one's assumptive world and life narrative, a process which gives one an opportunity for growth.<sup>206</sup> By forcing us to reassess the core beliefs we have about ourselves and the world, loss provides an occasion to sift through these assumptions, strengthening beliefs that are authentic,

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<sup>204</sup> Nairn, 444.

<sup>205</sup> Neimeyer et al., "Grief Therapy and the Reconstruction of Meaning: From Principles to Practice," 1.

<sup>206</sup> Neimeyer, "Fostering Posttraumatic Growth."

discarding the ones that are not, and thus developing a more meaningful life narrative and experiencing personal growth. As we will see, by providing a safe, shared space for grief, the workshop helped one participant engage in this exact process of reconstruction and healing.

Laura was undergoing a significant “change in [her] central beliefs” well before workshops began. In her survey reflection, she described going from seeing her organizing work through a climate justice lens, to seeing it through an anti-capitalist lens, citing her growing frustration and anger with the climate movement. Whereas she had once believed she was contributing to something transformative, she now felt betrayed, as if she had “been had” by the climate movement. Instead of helping to dismantle systems of exploitation, Laura’s hours of labor kept being channeled towards “dead ends” in the form of ineffective non-profit or capitalist solutions, a trend she noticed across the climate movement.

These dead ends, or strategic disappointments, can be understood as losses fracturing Laura’s assumptive world, causing her trust in the climate movement to falter. Fully engaging with these kinds of fractures could be painful, likely requiring Laura to re-evaluate important beliefs about the integrity of the movement, her own agency as an organizer, and even beliefs around whether or not meaningful social change is possible. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that without any community supports, Laura felt unable to engage with these fractures directly. Instead, she came to the workshops saying she felt stuck in a place of “rage and numbness,” a comment hinting at the way she was using anger and blame to restore coherence to a shattered assumptive world.

What does it mean to be part of a movement, and a world, that is full of dead ends? What value does your work have when you keep experiencing strategic losses? These were the painful questions Laura did not have the space to explore before the workshop. So, she found a way to bypass these questions. By blaming these “dead ends” on the factions of the movement that she saw as flawed, such as non-profits, she could avoid grappling with the reality that every part of the movement is flawed, and that doing liberation work means encountering loss and failure again and again. The problem here was not the blame itself (a reasonable response to the way non-profits can often hold back the climate movement) or even the rage. Rather, it was the way that rage and blame were being used as a way to *avoid* the pain of loss, instead of as a way to express and move through it.

By using rage to avoid pain and blame to avoid change (in the form of a new narrative), Laura was stuck in what Neimeyer calls a ‘disrupted narrative,’<sup>207</sup> or a narrative that helps restore meaning after loss, but does so in an inauthentic or superficial way. As Laura shared with the group, she felt her rage was causing her to behave in ways that she did not think were “good or in line with [her] values.” Thankfully, it was within the group process itself that Laura was able to deconstruct this disrupted narrative.

In witnessing the vulnerability of another participant sharing their pain, Laura shared that she was finally able to “get through that shell” of numbness and rage and be present to her own pain. In this way, Laura seemed to be able to move past a narrative of blame to one of compassion and solidarity. She shared her realization that even though

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<sup>207</sup> Neimeyer, “Fostering Posttraumatic Growth.”

the larger project for liberation was full of dead ends, this was okay “because it's motivated by a love for the world.” This shared motivation gave her a deep sense of connectedness to others in the movement, helping her accept the reality and inevitability, of failure and loss. She captures this by quoting comedian Maria Bamford, “‘we're all just doing our best - and sometimes that's not very good at all.’ And that's ok.”

Mourning with others seemed to help Laura tap into an important shared narrative. It was a narrative spacious enough to hold the harsh reality of loss alongside a sense of deep purpose. The harsh reality is, even if we do everything we can, and even if we do it from a place of love, we will *still* experience loss. We will still fail; we will meet dead end after dead end. And yet for Laura, the work is still worth doing, because we are doing it together, and we are doing it out of love.

Importantly, the fact that this narrative is grounded in love does not make it incompatible with rage and blame. Rather, with love as the foundation, rage and blame are more likely to be directed to the right place and in the right way—motivated by one's love for the world rather than by the fear of pain or change. For a time, Laura's rage was motivated less by love and more out of self-preservation. Without any container for her grief, it was her rage that kept her safe and protected her from the painful reality of loss. It was only in a group of her peers, people who could understand and hold this pain with her, that Laura was able face her grief. In doing so she was reminded of the deeper feelings motivating her work, allowing her to gather the loose threads of her narrative and weave them back into a shared cloth—one strong and broad and gentle enough to hold all of our losses, and all of our dead ends.

## 4.4 Conclusion

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Everything too beautiful for words / the whole world holy / on fire / once again  
asking that we see her / for real this time / hurry / please / just once more

before the end

---

This chapter demonstrated some of the different ways participants gave meaning to their climate grief and how meaning-making led to reconnection and healing. First, threaded through the narratives were six common emotional themes that participants used to describe and make sense of their experience of grief: anger/bitterness, fear/anxiety, guilt/self-criticism, hopelessness/despair, resolve/determination, and sorrow/hurt. Participants understood these emotions as impacting many areas of their lives, from their relationships with family and friends, to their organizing work, to their life decisions. Overall, the intensity and range of the emotional responses exposed a dire need for spaces in which organizers can express and make sense of their feelings, thereby giving deeper meaning in their loss.

Unfortunately, as the discussion indicates, these spaces generally do not exist due to the disenfranchisement of climate grief. The impacts of this on participants was clear. Not only were they dealing with the pain of grief, but they were also dealing with fallout from the individualized coping mechanisms they had been forced to resort to. The strategies of numbing, avoidance, and blame left participants feeling disconnected from their emotional and moral centers, disconnected from the purpose of their organizing

work, and even disconnected from their love for the world. Thankfully, the findings above also indicate that despite these interconnected barriers, when given the chance, participants were exceedingly capable of creating and benefitting from shared spaces of meaning-making.

There were several factors that seemed to go into setting up a workshop setting conducive to this process. First, it was critical that the space was set up to feel safe for participants and by using ritual to form a distinct, structured container for their grief. Second, within this container, there were multiple entry points into grief that gave participants the opportunity to surrender control and be present to pain. This was done through exercises like sharing from the heart, listening from the heart, free writes, and narrative métissage. The findings suggest that because they were given these kinds of opportunities in a safe environment, participants were able to move through numbness and fear, and experience healing through meaningful forms of connection. It was the experience of connection that allowed participants to fit their personal experience of loss into a bigger narrative, helping them give it meaning and making them feel more able to face loss going forward.

Laura's story is a clear example of this. Thanks to the safe container of the workshop, the vulnerability of others in the group, and her own ability to be open-hearted, Laura was able to be present to the pain of others in the group, and in doing so, touch into her own grief. In accessing this shared place of woundedness, Laura was also able to reconnect to a shared narrative, moving from an inauthentic story of blame and anger to a more genuine story of compassion and deep solidarity. This shared narrative



helped her make sense of the painful reality of loss, reminding her of the deeper purpose of her organizing work and equipping her to deal with the pain of loss in the future.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusion

—  
before it's too late,  
Don't lose the thread of your  
  
own life. Don't get swallowed up in  
bitterness, closing yourself off from  
  
healing  
  
is a giant wheel and she is turning  
the crank,  
winding us in, winding us in, pulling us towards  
  
a centre  
  
some will tell you there isn't one.  
There is.  
  
although we can never seem to settle on a name!  
—

The last four chapters were about unravelling and re-weaving. They were about the ways our sorrow for the world undoes us, dismantling our assumptions about goodness and justice, upending how we understand our role in the world, and destroying any illusions we had about being in control. The weaving of stories, poems, reflections, and narratives above also revealed how different this unravelling can look depending on one's social location, personal experiences, and access to community supports. Just as the métissage process represents, our individual experiences of grief open out onto an incredibly vast and varied tapestry, at once holding experiences that exist in harmony, in

tension, and sometimes in direct contradiction. Yet, amongst the intricacy and complexity, several recurring patterns arose, shedding light on the question: How do young climate organizers in amiskwaciwâskahikan (Edmonton, Alberta) give meaning to their experience of climate grief?

First, as the connecting points of the narratives demonstrated, among the wide range of individual experiences, six main emotional themes were used to describe and make sense of their lived experiences of climate grief: anger/bitterness, fear/anxiety, guilt/self-criticism, hopelessness/despair, resolve/determination, and sorrow/hurt. Next, sharing their narratives through the circle and métissage processes made clear that it was *the group itself* that allowed participants to give deeper and more enduring forms of meaning to their grief. When reflecting on the workshop exercises, participants consistently emphasized the embodied connection they felt to their peers, a connection that also helped them feel a part of something much bigger. It was the immediate and temporary group encounter that allowed participants to weave their thread into a narrative that both included and transcended the group itself.

Below, I summarize these two recurring patterns: the emotional motifs used to make sense of grief on a personal level, and the group process that wove these personal threads of grief into a bigger narrative, giving them a much deeper meaning. Then, I explore how these patterns, or research findings, might be practically applied and used to inform further research. Finally, I end by overlaying these patterns with my own personal experience—first in the form of theological reflection and then in an examination of my own ongoing journey of climate and political grief.

## 5.1 Reoccurring Patterns

—  
being thrown into this world is  
arriving blankly in a room like ...okay??  
what tf did I even come in here for again?

on the other hand, though,  
maybe it only seems that way

and really, we're not thrown in,  
but drawn out  
of soil  
our skin

every seam stitched just so  
and  
tighter than we could

ever  
imagine  
—

### 5.1.1 How do young climate organizers give meaning to their experience of climate grief? *What is their lived experience of climate grief?*

The narratives showed that although participants experienced and gave meaning to their climate grief in a wide range of ways, several emotional themes were common. Many participants described their grief in terms of feeling angry and resentful. Often, this anger was directed at the systems and people they understood as causing the climate crisis. For some, this anger and judgement was also directed inward and expressed as guilt or self-criticism that left them feeling like no matter what they did, it was never

enough. One way to interpret these two different forms of meaning-making is to see them as narratives of externalized or internalized blame. Within the theory of assumptive worlds, these narratives of blame function to help an individual maintain coherence in a world fractured by climate-related loss.<sup>208</sup> However, as the case study above demonstrates, these narratives can do real harm. In the absence of community supports, Laura resorted to a story of rage and blame in order to make sense of the ‘dead-ends’ (or losses) of her organizing work, a strategy that ultimately left her numb and acting in a way she felt was inauthentic. It was not until she could grieve in a group of peers that Laura was able to move past this story of blame and reconnect with an authentic and shared narrative.

In addition to anger and self-criticism, another common emotional theme was that of anxiety and fear. Many participants discussed fearing the future that lay ahead and feeling an urgent need to do everything they could to change its course. For some, this fear led to feelings of purpose and determination, emotions which motivated them to join with others in building a different world. Other times, participants described responding to this anxiety with hopelessness, despair and even resignation. Collapse seemed inevitable and imagining a better future felt impossible, leaving them struggling to find meaning in their organizing work. When we consider that much of climate-related loss is nonfinite (i.e., ongoing, affecting many areas of one’s life, and without an end in sight) it is not surprising that feelings like dread, hopelessness and despair are common among those confronting these losses on a regular basis.

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<sup>208</sup> Janoff-Bulman, *Shattered Assumptions: Towards a New Psychology of Trauma*, 62.

Finally, it seemed that beneath the participants' more visible emotions was a deeper experience of hurt and sorrow. Organizers expressed feeling pain over the scale of the crisis, including the destruction that had already occurred and the mass amounts of suffering yet to come. Others expressed sorrow over their helplessness in the face of this suffering, or over the knowledge that this suffering could have been avoided.

Unfortunately, despite these feelings of deep pain over the state of the world, the findings suggest that participants generally did not feel supported in this pain. It appeared that disenfranchisement denied them access to the tools and spaces necessary to process grief which forced many participants to resort to individualized coping mechanisms such as numbing, avoidance, and internalized or externalized blame. For many, these strategies seemed to develop subconsciously and it was only when they were invited to share with others that they realized the extent of their grief and how they had been avoiding it. For several participants, this discovery itself was painful as it revealed to them how alienated they had been from their deeper emotional selves and from the world.

Each participant's narrative gave insight into a unique and deeply complex lived experience of climate grief, one with many layers of meaning. Because of this, it is hard to generalize aspects of their experience to the wider population. However, what is clear, and likely common for many young climate organizers, is that climate grief can manifest as many different and sometimes contradictory emotions in the same person. It seems to have an impact on many, if not all, aspects of an organizer's internal and external life, including their organizing work, their plans for the future, their current life decisions, and their relationships with others and with themselves. Finally, because of the disenfranchisement of climate grief, the emotional impacts often go unrecognized, and

unaddressed, leaving organizers to cope in ways that are often unconscious and harmful.

### 5.1.2 How do young climate organizers give meaning to their experience of climate grief? *How can sharing this experience in a group setting lead to healing?*

By giving them opportunities to share their experience in a group setting, my research workshops allowed participants to give meaning to loss through experiences of connection. The ways participants described these experiences were surprisingly similar and often consistent with the existing grief and loss literature. For this reason, these findings are much more broadly applicable, allowing the following summary to do two things: answer the research question above, and provide a series of recommendations for others looking to support the grief of climate organizers in a group setting.

First, in order for meaning-making and healing to occur in a group, it is important to create a safe, intentional space for climate grief. Individuals should come into the space knowing what to expect and reassured that any emotional expression of grief is welcome. Using opening and closing rituals to make a container for grief can help create a sense of security, as does selecting a group of organizers who already know each other and/or have shared experiences. My research aligned with grief and loss literature suggesting that when a secure container is created, organizers can move through the feelings of fear and numbness that may be inhibiting their grieving process.<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> Anderson, “How Rituals Heal”; Hamilton, “Emotions, Reflexivity and the Long Haul.”

The fear organizers feel can be due to the unpredictability and vulnerability of grief, while numbness may occur as a way to avoid painful emotions they do not feel capable of addressing. Participants should be reassured that both of these responses are normal. Additionally, participants should be informed that although working through fear and numbness can be overwhelming and even painful (e.g., as they realize the extent to which they were disconnected from their own emotions), it can also feel liberating and extremely meaningful. Supporting group members to move through these barriers is essential as it allows them to be present to both their own pain and the pain of one another, thus experiencing connection and healing.

Being present to the pain of climate-related loss can be a difficult and unfamiliar process for many young climate organizers. Therefore, it is helpful to offer multiple ways for participants to enter into their grief as this allows them to engage with pain in a way that is most comfortable for them. These entry points can be exercises like sharing or listening from the heart, doing a narrative free write, or participating in a narrative métissage. My research suggests that even those who are inexperienced with or apprehensive about these exercises seem to be intuitively able to participate in and benefit from them. Whatever form it takes, an effective entry point invites participants to surrender control and be present to reality as it is, therefore opening themselves up to the uncertainty and mystery of the healing process.

In our workshops, participants discussed and experienced healing in terms of deepening connection or reconnection to themselves, to one another, or to something greater. Experiencing these connections seemed to help in a multitude of ways; for example, by grounding participants in a more authentic part of themselves, by reminding



them of a greater purpose for the work they do, or by providing a buffer for anxiety and despair, allowing them to feel more prepared to face the pain of loss going forward. By sharing together in deeply honest ways, participants are reminded they are not alone in their grief, but rather, it is their grief that connects them most deeply to each other and to the world.

Although all the components outlined above are important, my research suggests that it is not the facilitator, the rituals, or any of the exercises in themselves that provide healing; it is the immediate, embodied experience of the group itself. The group experience provided the basis for all the experiences of connection that helped organizers find meaning. At times, it seemed to act as a conduit, helping participants connect with a collective narrative bigger than the group, giving them access to broader, ongoing pathways for meaning. In my study, it was those who accessed these broader pathways who seemed to feel more resilient in the face of future loss and would therefore be more inclined to reengage with the world, an important indicator of healing.<sup>210</sup>

This last finding is significant and supported by literature emphasizing the importance of meaning-making in the grieving process.<sup>211</sup> The finding suggests that in addition to the guidelines outlined above, the facilitators of shared spaces for grief would be advised to intentionally provide organizers with the opportunity to connect with something beyond the group. This could be done in many ways. In my study, arts-based narrative and ritual practices proved to be particularly beneficial. This is likely because

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<sup>210</sup> Worden, *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy*.

<sup>211</sup> Hall, "Bereavement Theory: Recent Developments in Our Understanding of Grief and Bereavement"; Smit, "Theories and Models of Grief: Applications to Professional Practice."

these practices were based in the frameworks of spiritual care and narrative métissage, both of which focus on honoring the individual story while also integrating it into collective frameworks of meaning. Lastly, providing ways for organizers to connect with these larger frameworks of meaning is especially important because of the nonfinite nature of climate loss. Climate-related losses are only going to increase in frequency and severity as time goes on; armouring organizers with narratives that can give meaning to this loss in an enduring and resilient way will only become more and more important.

## 5.2 Putting the Patterns to Good Use

I am hopeful that going forward I will be able to apply this learning to my work as an organizer and spiritual care provider; already, I am using my findings to design and facilitate arts-based climate grief workshops with other groups of young organizers. In addition to offering workshops, my goal is to support organizing groups to develop their own ongoing community practices for emotional and spiritual health (e.g., starting each meeting with a grounding ritual or series of acknowledgements). Lastly, I plan to use relevant findings from this research to create a guidebook or workbook that other organizers and groups can use to learn about and work through their own climate and political grief.

Entering into this research, I was optimistic that findings from my study would be applicable to broader populations. However, my research revealed that the grief and healing experiences of young climate organizers are deeply intertwined with their personal and collective identities as organizers, making their experiences distinct from that of non-organizers. One notable example of this was the deep and healing connection

many participants felt to their wider organizing communities and to the climate or liberation movements more broadly. Of course, non-organizers would not have access to these same feelings of connectedness to these groups, and would therefore be less likely to benefit from the application of this finding.

Interestingly, however, their lack of connection to a climate community and the climate movement may actually help explain why so much of the general public finds it impossible to face the painful reality of climate loss—they do not have access to the same collective narratives that give meaning to climate-related loss that organizers do. Thus, in light of this, one could imagine designing grief workshops that emphasize these community and movement connections and invite non-organizers to either join the climate movement or reflect on other communities and movements they already feel a meaningful connection to.

Finally, it is important to note that the demographics of my research participants will limit the applicability of my findings. The majority of participants were white, most were attending or had graduated from university, and all were settlers or visitors on Treaty 6 territory. This meant that the lived experiences of many young climate organizers and land defenders were not represented in my findings. Additionally, the fact that my own positionality matched this majority meant that despite my efforts, the workshop space was likely structured and co-created in a way that centered a white, university-educated, settler experience of grief and healing.

### 5.3 Going Forward

—  
more than anything  
we wade into conversations slowly,  
cautious, assessing risk  
where is your head at? will you go here with me? are you angry,  
is there something coming up in you that will haul out some  
fresh old hurt lurking  
inside the wells of me?

you draw me out of myself again and again and so  
*gloriously*  
—

Where does the topic of climate grief in organizers go from here, in theory and in practice? As my research suggests, group sharing and collaborative narrative writing are two incredibly powerful ways to understand and help heal climate grief in young organizers. However, there are several other interesting avenues of exploration, relevant to both researchers and practitioners. These include offering spaces for spiritual practice, exploring the relationship between organizers and land, and creating shared spaces for political grief.

My research workshop integrated certain spiritual practices (e.g., opening and closing rituals), but one could also offer climate grief workshops that are fully centered around spirituality. In my research survey, 71% of respondents indicated interest in attending workshops on climate grief and spirituality in the future. A possible workshop design could include exercises aiming to help participants both articulate their own spiritual beliefs and explore various spiritual practices. Practices such as meditation,

contemplative prayer, and mindfulness could help individuals connect with their deeper emotions, an important part of the grieving process. Additionally, discussing spiritual beliefs could help organizers strengthen their sense of purpose and help them find meaning in something bigger than themselves, two important aspects of healing and grief work.

A second site of potential healing and further research is that of the relationship between climate organizers and the land they live on. Although I had to leave this topic out of my own study due to space constraints, I believe it is critical for settler organizers to explore their relationship to land, both as part of their obligation as treaty people and community organizers, and as an avenue to express and heal from their own grief. Practically, this could look like offering spaces for settler organizers to critically reflect on their relationship to land (e.g., by confronting the legacy of their settler ancestors). It could also look like spending time outdoors, exploring the ways they are intimately connected to the ecosystem of which they are a part. As referenced in the findings, several participants discussed how feelings of connection to or disconnection from nature had a profound impact on their experience of climate grief and healing, reinforcing the importance of this topic.

One final topic of interest that could be pursued is the topic of political grief. Many research participants expressed feeling grief over the suffering caused by systems such as colonialism, capitalism, and white supremacy. For many, these feelings were inextricably linked to their climate grief, likely because they understood these systems as the main drivers of the climate crisis. Like climate grief, political grief seems to be disenfranchised, meaning that providing spaces to help organizers validate and express

this grief could be extremely beneficial. I include an example of what unpacking political grief can look like at the end of this chapter.

Evidently, climate grief in organizers is a complex, multi-faceted phenomenon. And although this can cause it to feel overwhelming and confusing for those who either study it or struggle with it, this complexity also means there are many different avenues by which we can seek to understand it and heal from it. Because climate grief will only become more relevant and widespread as the climate crisis accelerates, exploring these various avenues is more important than ever.

## 5.4 To Know You are Not Alone - Theological Reflection

—

Never brought into the field to bleed, never  
drawn into a circle and shown how to weep

no one taught me to pray but the forest herself,  
the light through her, the ground of everything

since we were born, she's been calling out!  
desperate to get just this one thing across:

there is only

*one world*

and

*she loves us,*

enough (don't be mad)

to unravel us

—

How do young climate organizers give meaning to their experience of climate grief? It was clear from the discussion and survey responses that the most significant part of the workshop for participants was the experience of being part of a group. They talked about what a gift it was to witness others share their grief so honestly and how powerful it was to express their own pain in the presence of people who understood. Essentially, and quite simply, participants told me that the reason the group gave meaning to their experience of climate grief was because *it helped them know they were not alone*.

Reflecting on this as a researcher, and as a theology student, I admit I was a bit underwhelmed. Was it really that simple? The whole devastating, endless reality of the climate crisis and it is enough to be reminded that you are not alone in your pain? No elaborate theological or philosophical theories on suffering and the meaning of life needed? The more I thought about it however, the more it made sense.

I realized that when participants said the group helped them know they were not alone, they were not talking about a conceptual or abstract kind of knowing, the kind that comes from someone just telling you that you not alone. Rather, they were referring to an *embodied and experiential* knowing. The kind of knowing that was possible because, despite taking place entirely over Zoom, the workshop itself was embodied experience. As participants opened up and shared their grief with the group, they responded to one another's pain with their bodies, in the form of tears, a shaky voice, a tightened throat, or a caring gaze. These empathetic responses meant participants were *physically* experiencing one another's pain and compassion. They could physically feel their connectedness; they could feel experientially that they were not alone.

Reflecting on this, I realized that grieving together in this way brings us outside of ourselves. We are no longer isolated individuals having our own personal experience; we are individuals existing in and through a *shared* experience, participating in a shifting, communal field of grief and love. Therefore, in a space of shared mourning, not only are we not alone with our grief; our grief is the least alone thing about us! It is the exact part of us that is drawing us most fully into a shared experience of being.

I could now see that for participants to not feel alone in their grief during the workshop was no small thing—they were experiencing the collective holding and acceptance of their individual pain. But I had a hunch there was still something more to it. It made sense why the group experience *within* the workshop was so meaningful, but how did this experience also bring some participants so far *beyond* the workshop, allowing them to feel a meaningful connection to the wider community, to the larger movement, or to the earth itself?

In theological terms, I believe it has something to do with communion. In the Christian tradition, communion refers to temporary, embodied experiences here on earth that remind us of our union with an infinite and transcendent God. One common example is the Eucharist, a ritual in which a group of people share bread and wine (which represents—or becomes, depending on your belief system—Jesus' body) with one another, in order to know, experientially, that they are connected and part of one body, the body of Christ. The intention of this embodied knowing is for it to remind those participating that what is true here and now, is also true *everywhere and for all eternity*—every inch of the entire incarnate universe, every single atom, is connected and part of the same unified body of Christ.



I think something similar can happen when we grieve together. As we stumble into one another's open hearts and open wounds, the barriers between us blurred, we experience embodied communion. And, on some occasions, we experience this connection as *so* deeply true and *so* familiar that we know (often in way that is beyond words) what is true here, must be true *everywhere*. Just like the ritual of the Eucharist, and the traditional Christian practice of contemplative prayer, grieving together reminds us of what we all too often forget—a part of us has always existed outside of ourselves; something core within us has always belonged to something much greater, whether we call it God, the world, or community!

In my research, it was *through* their embodied connection to one another that participants were reminded of their deep connection to something transcendent. And it was this transcendent connection that seemed to provide the most enduring forms of meaning, meaning that could strengthen them as they faced what lay ahead. It seemed that what the participants told at was true—it *was* possible to face the whole devastating, endless reality of the climate crisis, simply by being reminded that one is not alone!

Reflecting on this further, I had another lightbulb moment. I realized that being with others was *such* an important part of healing and meaning-making that, if given the choice,

*people would rather be in pain and be with others, than be numb and alone.*

Even though we are afraid of it, we are also each longing for communion, longing for spaces where we can be deeply honest about how scared we are, about what we love most about the world and how afraid we are to lose it. Unfortunately, all too often, we

don't actually have a choice—we cannot choose to be in pain and in communion because spaces of communion simply do not exist. And, in the absence of shared spaces to grieve and create meaning, we become numb to our pain, unable to carry the weight of it alone, afraid that it will destroy us if we try.

It should hardly be surprising then, that so many participants came to the workshop feeling numb. And, that when sensation started to return, the first thing they felt was not the pain of climate grief but the pain of *disconnect*, the pain of *not being in communion*. It was the pain of being neglected by your community in a time of need; the pain of being forced, as a result of this neglect, to withdraw further, disconnecting from your deeper emotional self in order to cope; perhaps it was even the pain of realizing you had been denied the opportunity to experience your life fully, denied your birthright of a life lived to its edges, to its depth and breadth—painful and beautiful and overwhelmingly, undeniably *real*.

In the workshop, when participants all finally had the choice between being disconnected and numb, or connected and in pain, they all chose the latter. Whether it was a conscious choice or not, some deeper part of them intuitively knew what they needed and knew that with shared grief came the communion they were longing for. And even though it could not necessarily take the pain away, communion *would* help give their pain meaning. Why? Maybe it's because the deepest, fullest, and most enduring meaning we can give our pain—whether it is the pain of loss, the pain of loneliness, or the pain of looking into the future knowing things are about to get a whole lot worse—is the comfort we find in remembering that at the deepest depths and furthest edges of our life, painful and mysterious as they may be, we are not, and will never be, alone.

We may not ever understand the losses we encounter; we may not ever feel able to accept them; and we may never even stop feeling the pain of them. But, in my experience, knowing we exist as part of something much bigger than ourselves means that the loss, whatever it is, will never be able to fully define us or destroy us. So, we need not fear loss quite so much because, in some incomprehensible way, we exist beyond it, beyond our own individual stories of suffering. Although we may have a thousand different ways to explain the way our story is woven into ‘something bigger,’ and although we may remember and forget this fundamental aspect of ourselves thousands of times for the rest of our lives, to experience communion is to experience healing. It is to remember, *with our bodies*, our own deep belonging. It is to know we are not alone.

## 5.5 Initiation into Loss – Part II

I end this exploration of grief with one final piece of my own narrative. Healing takes us on very different routes throughout our lives, and while writing this thesis, my own path took a somewhat unexpected detour (that of course, turned out to take me exactly where I needed to go). Below, I tell a story about what healing had to teach me about whiteness and my role in the fight for liberation.

### **Someone on TV asks what do you think of when you hear the word free**

I think of gazing into faces of people as they pass considering how good they must be and hoping they’re off to have coffee with a lover or an old friend someone who knows just how to love them or is simply asking to be given the chance to try

I think about how surprised I am at the brightness of my own blood outside my body and how much it looks like her blood in the street long after riot police leave bringing their boots and their gloves home but bringing these home to their girlfriends

I think about the day, that balcony  
Lula de Silva saying to me and you and anyone asking,

“The powerful can kill one, two, or one hundred roses,  
but they will never stop the arrival of spring

And our fight  
is in search  
of spring.”

I think of spring, of seeds, of all the harvests I won't live to see  
I think of my enemies, who,

I'm sorry to say God I do not love  
I think of their children  
who I just learned that I do

Who will tell Ross Beaty's youngest daughter  
(grad student, UBC)

We stand beside Julio González Arango, but babe  
we are fighting for you too.

—

At the beginning of all this, I shared a story about loss and how good it felt to cry in a bar with my friends, a story that marked the start of a 2.5-year journey exploring what it means to grieve together. I went into this journey knowing how important it was for climate grief to be held in community. But what I also found out over the course of my research was just how much grieving together has to *teach us* about being in community. I came to see how climate grief is actually just one part of a much deeper and broader kind of heartbrokenness, and how, it is only by *journeying into* this very same place of heartbreak, that we can be drawn into real community.

I was about half a year into my research when I started sensing that climate grief was actually related to a deeper and more expansive kind of grief, but I struggled to put

this feeling into words. Around the same time, the topics of whiteness and white supremacy began surfacing repeatedly in my personal life and in my research. Although something in me felt drawn to explore them, I couldn't quite see how they fit with my thesis topic. I knew white supremacy was a major systemic cause of the climate crisis, but I wasn't sure what it all had to do with climate grief; so, I decided to ignore them, resolving to return to them once my thesis was done. But, as you may well know, healing is endlessly persistent—the concepts continued to come up, again and again. Finally, I relented, putting my thesis aside for a few days to try to figure out what white supremacy had to do with climate grief.

This was the clearly the right move. After reaching out to a friend for some resources on whiteness and anti-racism, I barely got a few pages into the first article before reading a sentence that made me freeze. “Whites tend to think of racial identity as something that other people have, not something that is salient for them.”<sup>212</sup> I sat back, stunned. Up until that very moment I had never fully thought of my whiteness as a racial identity; I never considered it to be a core part of who I was. Reflecting on this was uncomfortable. I realized that on some level, this was because I didn't *want* whiteness to be a core part of me; I didn't want to be associated with the destructive and terrible things white people, and white supremacy, had done. The longer I sat with this, the more it became clear. I may have accepted white supremacy on a theoretical level, but I had no way accepted it on a personal or emotional one.

### Whiteness and Distorted Narratives

At this point, I still only had a vague sense of how coming to terms with my own whiteness was related to climate grief. But I could see that the work was important, and that I had been avoiding it for a long time. One of the first things these articles helped me see was how exactly I had been avoiding it. In order to accept the reality of white

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<sup>212</sup> Beverly Daniel Tatum, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?: And Other Conversations About Race*, (New York NY: Perseus Books Group, 1997), 94, quoted in Tema Okun, “From White Racist to White Anti-Racist: The Lifelong Journey,” *Dismantling Racism Works*, <https://www.fammed.wisc.edu/files/webfm-uploads/documents/diversity/LifeLongJourney.pdf>. 4-5.

supremacy without having to *actually* identify myself with it, I had created a kind of distorted narrative. I had been telling myself (only somewhat subconsciously) that I was one of the ‘good’ white people. Just look at all the justice work I was doing! Look how progressive my politics were! I wasn’t like those ‘bad’ white people, the reactionaries and conservatives, the ones who came from money, the ones who didn’t organize or get involved in their communities, the ones who didn’t talk about race with the right terminology. By blaming other white people, I could distance myself from whiteness—freeing me from doing the painful work of reckoning with my own racial identity.

Although this narrative was obviously benefitting me, I was also starting to see how much it was harming me; how it was preventing me from being in real community. As an organizer, this narrative meant that I didn’t know where I fit in the broader fight for liberation. My unaddressed feelings of shame around my whiteness and privilege made me feel I had no right to claim I was fighting alongside the likes of the people in my poem: Julio González Arango, Lula de Silva, or Mya Thwet Thwet Khine (a young woman murdered at an anti-coup protest in Myanmar two days before she turned 20). And for obvious reasons, I also didn’t want to identify with other white people, especially those who had similar privileges to me like Ross Beaty’s youngest daughter (Ross Beaty is the white billionaire founder of a mining company implicated in the murder of Xinca land defender, Julio González Arango).

The readings I was doing helped me realize that this narrative, and the feelings of alienation that went with it, wasn’t unique to me. Keeping people alienated from each other, and relating to one another in terms of superiority and inferiority, *is the very logic of white supremacy*. White supremacy is a hierarchy of domination; it functions by convincing us we need to earn our worth by being superior, or dominant, over others. As white people, we may have been taught that the colour of our skin makes us superior to others (either morally, biologically, or socially), but we still exist in the pyramid—there will always be someone else above us, and we will always be at risk of losing our position if our superiority is challenged.

And the latter is exactly what happened as I initially starting learning about white supremacy years ago. Not only was my imagined position threatened, but the whole

foundation of the pyramid itself. I was realizing that rather than making me morally superior (as I was implicitly taught), my whiteness actually made me complicit in a deeply *immoral* system of oppression. I wasn't yet ready to face the truth of this. I couldn't own up to the harm I was complicit in as a white person because I was afraid it owning up to it would knock me out of the pyramid altogether. Having nothing yet to replace the pyramid with, I did a patch job instead, propping myself up in my position of superiority with the narrative, "at least I'm better than other white people."

Of course, like most distorted narratives, this story could only last for so long. It was alienating, lonely, and unstable. Over the past year, it has started to unravel. I can't say exactly what it was, perhaps my thesis work around climate grief, perhaps it was the work I was doing in therapy, but either way, there was a deep well of grief within me that was connected somehow to my whiteness, one eating away at the foundations of the pyramid and demanding to be seen.

### Grief and Community

Reading more of the articles my friend had sent me, I realized that unravelling my distorted narrative and facing the reality of white supremacy would mean going to that deeper realm of grief I had sensed before, the expansive one onto which climate grief also opened out. I didn't know what to call it other than a deep heartbrokenness. It was a place of sorrow and grief over the brokenness of our world and the unimaginable levels of inequality, injustice, and human suffering that it holds. I had visited this place in the midst of my climate grief, but this time it was different. Going to this place of heartbrokenness through the wound of white supremacy meant not just grieving the brokenness of the world, but also coming to terms with my *own* brokenness and shame. It would mean facing (and even harder, being accountable for) the ways I was benefiting from, and was helping to uphold, a brutal system of domination and oppression.

But it also meant facing the painful ways that white supremacy had harmed *me*. Sitting with the pain helped me realize that not only had white supremacy taught me to objectify and dehumanize others, it had taught me to do the same to myself. It taught me that my worth was conditional. It taught me to see my relationships with others in terms

of superiority and domination instead of reciprocity and genuine care. It taught me that if I messed up, if I admitted to my own weakness, failures, flaws, I would be catapulted down to the bottom of the pyramid.

When I took the time to really sit with all this, I realized that my grief lay in the knowledge that all this could be otherwise. There was an alternative to this pyramid. We *could* exist in communities of love and support, ones that—although they may not be perfect—would at least teach us that our worth is not dependent on superiority, power, or perfection; communities that would tell us it's okay to own up to the ways you've failed and harmed others, it's okay to face pain and shame and loss, it's okay because no matter what happens, *you belong*. This is what white supremacy (and the interlocking systems of capitalism, colonialism and the patriarchy) took from us. White supremacy taught me I was unworthy of genuine community, unworthy of unconditional belonging. This meant that I was too afraid to own up to the harm I was complicit in and too afraid to go to the places of deep grief and shame. But the beautiful thing was, it was precisely by being invited *into genuine community*, that I was able to finally face that pain.

### Collective Liberation

The only reason I was finally able to start facing the reality of my racial identity as a white person was because of community. It was clear from the beginning that I couldn't do the work of facing my internalized white supremacy alone. I needed my friend to send me those resources and go for long walks with me to talk about them. I needed teachings on collective liberation from people of colour like bell hooks, Paulo Freire, and Lama Rod Owens. I needed the examples set by white people doing anti-racist work like Ann Brayden, Chris Crass and Tema Okun. I needed community. And the more I read, the more I realized that that's exactly what these authors and organizers were inviting me into—a global community of people fighting for collective liberation, a community that had a clear place for me as a white person. Although mostly made up of people I had never met, this community acknowledged the deeper humanity in me in a way that was transformative.



The movement for collective liberation saw my racial identity with crystal clarity; it acknowledged the *full extent of the harm I was complicit in as a white person*. And yet it *also* saw my humanity. It saw the very part of me that I thought made me as ‘morally inferior’ and therefore worthless. It saw this and didn’t say I was worthless; it said the opposite. It acknowledged my deep worth, my humanity, my ability to change, and the important role I was called to in the fight for liberation.

I needed community to support me in order to face my grief, but I also needed to grieve in order to remember how to be in community. Going into my own woundedness, I was able to finally see how connected I actually was to others in the movement. It was as if my own woundedness was like a deep well within me, and as I followed it down, examining my own feelings of hurt and shame, I saw this well bottomed out onto the same ground water as everyone else’s, the same vast source of grief and pain. My shame and hurt didn’t have to distance me from others in the movement, it could be the very thing that connected me to them.

Being in genuine community means identifying deeply with the humanity of the other; it means seeing the ways they are hurt by the very same broken systems I am; it means mourning with them as they mourn, knowing our oppression, and therefore our liberation, is connected. But crucially, it means doing all this *without obscuring the real and often unjust differences between our suffering*. Our wells of grief may be connected, but they each hold their own water within them. The people in my poem have experiences that I will never fully understand. I will never know what it’s like to grow up under a regime that wants me dead; or how it feels to resist colonial and imperialist projects knowing there was a real chance it could get me or my family killed.

And this didn’t only apply to people experiencing more layers of marginalization and oppression than me. I would also never know the specifics of Ross Beaty’s experience of grief, or his daughter’s. And yet, like the others, I could be sure they had been wounded by the same broken world as I had been, and therefore, needed, and *deserved*, liberation just as much as me or anybody else.

## Healing

It was this healing process that allowed me to finally start owning my racial identity. I was finally able to admit that yes, white supremacy *has* formed core parts of my identity, in ways that have led me to harm others and myself, and in ways I must continue to be accountable for. However, that is not the end of the story. Although my whiteness is a critically important aspect of who I am, *it is not what ultimately defines me*. Collective liberation helped me begin to dismantle the pyramid of white supremacy and replace it with a new story—a story about our shared grief, our shared humanity, and our shared liberation. It is a story telling us the very same thing that the good news of the gospel tells us: that it is not our mistakes or our brokenness that define us, but rather the wholeness weaving our brokenness together that makes us who we are.

When we grieve together—in a bar after a lost campaign, or in a narrative shared through writing or speaking—we are reminded of this, even if only fleetingly. When we share one another’s pain, we overcome false division and experience ourselves and each other as we truly are—threads in the same tapestry, beloved parts of the same body of Christ, roses growing and dying and fighting and yearning for the same eternal spring. Remembering this liberates us. It liberates us from needing to be perfect, from needing to be superior. It liberates us from the fear of loss, the fear of annihilation. And it liberates us from the tyranny of our own small stories.

And that sounds like good news to me.

**Not to take pain away but to help carry it**

you are less alone than  
you ever thought possible

yes,  
there is the armour of your  
essential loneliness,  
the way no one will ever really be enough for you

but really,  
it's not about you. it's not about enough.

it's about the letter the Zapatista women  
wrote in 2019 to say they love us and  
they know the

fight is long and  
so hard

but there is this thread  
sister, comrade, listen. there is

this thread we know of,  
thick and strong and woven  
between us and everyone  
who dreams

you are pulling,  
they are pulling,  
and  
we are pulling

with them.

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## Appendix A

### Climate Grief Workshops – Outlines and Description

#### **Workshop #1 - Group discussion workshop (2.5 hr)**

TIME	Activity
<b>15 min</b>	Welcome and workshop overview
<b>15 min</b>	Opening the space <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Grounding exercise (light candles, acknowledgments and dedication)</li> <li>- Check in question</li> </ul>
<b>20 min</b>	What is climate grief? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Explanation of terms (climate grief, grieving process etc.)</li> </ul>
<b>5 min</b>	Group norms <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Suggest norms, invite additional norms</li> </ul>
<b>15 min</b>	Breakout room partner discussion with prompts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “What has your journey been with climate/political grief?”</li> <li>- “What are you still uncertain about when it comes to your climate grief?”</li> </ul>
<b>10 min</b>	Report back <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Partners share what they discussed</li> </ul>
<b>10 min</b>	Free write with prompts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “Describe a time you felt an intense emotion about the climate crisis.”</li> <li>- “Describe a moment when something shifted in how you understood the climate crisis. What feelings were associated with this?”</li> </ul>
<b>5 min</b>	Explain circle process <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Share from the heart, listen from the heart</li> </ul>
<b>15 min</b>	Circle process <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Prompt: “What is on your heart to share right now?”</li> </ul>
<b>5 min</b>	Closing the space <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Put out candles, moment of reflection (what are taking away from today?)</li> <li>- Share optional prompts for further reflection</li> </ul>

### 3) Narrative métissage workshop (2.5 hr)

TIME	Activity
<b>5 mins</b>	Welcome, overview
<b>15 mins</b>	Opening the space <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Grounding exercise (light candles, acknowledgments and dedication)</li> <li>- Check in question</li> </ul>
<b>5 mins</b>	Description of métissage process
<b>20 mins</b>	Narrative free write <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Prompt: “What does it feel like to be alive in the world right now?”</li> </ul>
<b>5 min</b>	Example métissage
<b>15 min</b>	Time for editing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Individuals edit and select portions of narrative to share</li> </ul>
<b>30 mins</b>	Facilitated métissage process <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Placed into groups of 2-4</li> <li>- Groups weave narratives together</li> </ul>
<b>20 mins</b>	Performance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Small groups perform their métissages</li> </ul>
<b>15 mins</b>	Group debrief with prompts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What stood out, what resonated?</li> <li>- What was it like to share? To listen?</li> <li>- What came up for you?</li> <li>- How did your understanding of your own grief change?</li> </ul>
<b>15 min</b>	Circle process <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Prompt: “What is on your heart to share right now?”</li> </ul>
<b>5 min</b>	Closing the space <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Put out candles, moment of reflection (what are taking away from today?)</li> <li>- Share optional prompts for further reflection</li> </ul>

#### Description of Workshop Processes and Practices

Below is an explanation of the various parts of the two workshops. In quotations are excerpts from my script.

**Opening the Workshop** - I used a ritual to open the container of the workshop and identify it as a space set apart from everyday life. This involved inviting participants to light a candle and take a minute to breathe deeply and ground themselves in their bodies.



Once everyone was more settled and grounded, I read out a series of acknowledgments (pg. 12-13 in this thesis) and then invited participants to dedicate their time in the workshop to someone. These last two parts of the ritual were intended to help remind the group of the web of relationship that we exist within.

**Dedication Script:** Now, I'll invite each of you to reflect for a moment, on someone whom you would like to dedicate this work today to.

By dedicating this time and this work to someone we love, we honor our relationship to that person while also recognizing the importance of our work here today. The inner healing work we do is not just for own wellbeing. It is what allows us to show up for one another and be in right relationship, keeping our communities strong.

It could be someone you know personally, a friend or family member or ancestor. It could also be someone who has yet to be born or a being from the more-than-human world! You might think of someone whose sacrifice allowed you to be today, or someone who is one of the reasons that you do climate work. You will not have to share who this is.

Spend a quiet moment looking at the flame of. you candle and thinking about this person or being, honoring them with your thoughts.

**Free Writes** - The free write exercises included a 10 minute free write in the first session (with the prompt “describe a time when you felt an intense emotion about the climate crisis”) and a 20-minute narrative free write in the second session (with the prompt, “what does it feel like to be alive in the world right now?”). The participants were invited to respond to the prompt in a stream of consciousness manner, trying to write for the allotted time without stopping, censoring, or editing their writing. They were encouraged to let the writing take them where they needed to go. When they participated in the 20-minute narrative free write, I described it this way:

Try to think of a specific experience related to your experience of climate grief. The narrative could span a period of time, several months to several years, or it could document one evening or one moment. It doesn't need to be a conventional story (beginning, middle, end), but can be if you choose. Recall the events but also the emotions you felt (i.e., *write about what happened and how you felt about what happened*). Try to write as detailed and as vividly as possible.

It doesn't have to be perfect. In fact, it's better if it isn't—*métissage* works because it is a bit messy. There will also be several opportunities to go back and change things, to add or take away sections.

**Group Norms** – During this section of the workshop, I shared a series of workshop norms that would guide our behavior in the workshops. After inviting participants to add to these norms, I asked that we all agree to uphold them as best we could throughout our time together.

***Right to pass*** - Remember you can decline to answer any question and step back from any part of the workshop at any time. Trust that you will know when this is!

***Hold space for emotions*** - All emotions are welcome, anything from anger, to sorrow, to feeling numb and disconnected. Resist the urge to try rush or avoid an emotion.

***Confidentiality*** - Take what you learned, leave what you heard. Respect the privacy of others. Do not share people's stories without their consent.

***Trust yourself*** - Trust that you will know what you need to share, where you need to go.

***Trust the process*** - Grieving is an act of showing up and then surrendering. We do not have to do the work; we only have to get out of the way.

***Be honest*** - This does not mean you have to share everything on your mind. It means being honest about where you are at in that moment.

**Métissage Process** – After participating in the 20-minute narrative free write, participants were asked to go back to their narrative to edit it and select the parts of it they felt most comfortable sharing. Then, in groups of 2-3, participants read their narratives to one another and wove the text of all of their narratives together to create one final shared piece. In the final step, the small groups returned to the main room and performed their collaborative narrative for one another. For a more detailed description and script for facilitating métissage workshops, see Bishop and Etmanski's guide.<sup>213</sup>

**Circle Process** - At the end of each workshop, I invited participants to take part in a circle process, during which we all took turns responding to the prompt, "what is on your heart to share right now?" Before we started, I asked that participants be intentional about two things: sharing from the heart and listening from the heart. Sharing from the heart (rather than the head) meant being as honest as possible about where one's heart was at in that moment. For some, this also meant deciding not to rehearse or plan an answer beforehand, instead sharing spontaneously from the heart. Listening from the heart meant being as emotionally and cognitively present as possible to whoever was sharing (including not thinking about your own answer while others are speaking!).

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<sup>213</sup> Bishop and Etmanski, "The What, Why and How of Métissage," <https://onlineacademiccommunity.uvic.ca/comarts/wp-content/uploads/sites/3036/2020/08/Clover-Suriani-D-Gelderman-Sanford-Feminist-Adult-Educators-Guide.pdf>.

**Closing the Workshop** – The closing ritual involved another two-minute grounding exercise and then putting out our candles all together. I also invited participants to decide whether or not they wanted to ‘put the lid on their container.’ This meant intentionally choosing to either take the emotions from the session back with them into their regular lives, *or* leave their emotions here ‘in the container’ of the workshop, coming back to them during the next session or at another time. Along with the opening ritual, this closing visualization helped create a sense of security and structure by clarifying the boundary between the workshop space and their regular lives.

## Appendix B

### Optional Reflection Prompts – Handout for Workshop Participants

Below is a document I shared with participants for their personal use. They were invited (but not obligated) to take time before and in between the workshops to reflect on the questions below.

#### **Part 1 - The 4 Tasks of Climate Grief**

Below are the tasks (or stages) of climate grief as I've identified based on my own experience and research into grief and loss. Read through them and try to identify parts of your own journey that may fit into one or more of the stages. Where might you still have work to do?

Tasks / Stages (iterative and non-linear)	Description	Stage of healing
<b>1. Identifying Loss / Emotions</b>	Recognizing what <i>specifically</i> the climate crisis (and/or the systems that cause it) have taken from you/your community. Identifying the emotions you have in response to these losses and learning how to cope with them effectively.	Re/Connect with self
<b>2. Emotional Expression</b>	Expressing and sharing your emotions around climate-related loss through art, movement, conversation, ritual, prayer etc. This is also the task of honoring loss.	Re/Connect with community
<b>3. Exploration of Meaning</b>	Asking how the climate crisis has changed/informed what you find to be meaningful in your life (e.g., your values, goals, sense of connection to the world, sense of purpose).	Re/Connect with greater narrative
<b>4. Finding Your Work</b>	Letting your journey with grief and loss inform what your work is, both internal (within yourself) and external (within the world).	Re/Connect with purpose

## Part 2 - Reflection Questions

Here's some guiding questions/exercises to help you reflect deeper on the various tasks.

Note: Some of these are *very big questions*, the kind you could spend your whole life answering! Only use whatever feels helpful to you right now.

### 1. Identifying Loss

- Reflect on a specific time you felt a strong emotion in response to the climate crisis. How did you feel? What part/s of the climate crisis caused you to feel this way?
- Take some time to think about and write down the specific things you (or your family/community) have lost due to the climate crisis and/or the systems that cause it. (e.g. a specific dream for your future)
- How might your social position (e.g. race, class, gender identity) have influenced the losses you experience or don't experience?
- Think/write about a specific time when climate-related loss caused a significant shift in the way you understood the world and your role in it (e.g. a belief in progress, trust in older generations, belief in your own agency).
  - How did you deal with this shift?
  - Do you understand the world differently now?

### Identifying Emotions

- Which emotions have you felt as a result of climate-related loss? Try to name as many as possible.
  - How do you think you cope with each of these feelings?
  - How have they impacted your life? (e.g. your organizing, studies, relationships)
  - Are there other feelings that may be *underneath* the feelings you listed?
- Were you able to express these feelings? If not, how have you coped with them?
- How do you want to be able to cope with these feelings going forward (and what resources do you need to do so)?
- How might your coping mechanisms be influenced by [white supremacy culture?](#) (characteristics include individualism, perfectionism, sense of urgency etc.)
- How have you been taught to cope with other, non-climate losses in your life? How might your social context (family, society) have informed the way you deal with loss?

### 2. Emotional Expression

- Select 1-2 of your most complex feelings around climate change and give them a metaphor (e.g. anger as burning coals, despair is a dark pit). Do a 15 min free write using these metaphors. Free writing is writing without stopping or editing for a timed period; the intention is to let the writing guide you (ie. don't overthink it!)
- Do you feel like you have spaces where you can express your emotions around climate change? If not, what can you do to create these spaces?

### **3. Exploration of Meaning**

- Reflect on a time when something shifted in how you thought about the climate crisis. How did this shift impact how you understood the world and your role in it?
- Create a timeline of your involvement in climate organizing/activism.
  - Identify what key feelings were present at each stage (both the feelings that were motivating your work, and those that were a response to the work). How were these feelings affecting you personally at the time?
  - Identify the points on the timelines when you felt the most/least connected (either to yourself, others, the work etc.).
  - Take some time to write about anything new/uncomfortable/surprising that came up.

### **4. Finding Your Work**

- What motivates you in this work? What is your role in the movement? How do you define whether or not you/the movement are being effective?
- Is the way you have been engaging in climate work sustainable in the long term (why or why not)? What can you do to make your work sustainable and joyful?
- How does your social position impact your work in the movement? How may your racial identity have shaped the way you, or others, understand your role in the movement (e.g. expectations and assumptions about it)? Are there aspects of this you want to change? If you are a settler—what are your movement obligations as a settler?

Appendix C

Follow-up Survey

# Climate Grief Workshop - Follow-up Survey

This is a survey for participants in the graduate research project: "Climate Grief in Young Organizers: Collaborative narrative as meaning-making," by researcher Gabrielle Gelderman.

By completing and submitting this survey you agree to have your responses used in the research project named above. Survey responses will be kept confidential and only used in the manner outlined in the participant consent form

([https://drive.google.com/file/d/1iW\\_5\\_aj53eeyKs9PfGK6ocwtfdaIE9X5/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1iW_5_aj53eeyKs9PfGK6ocwtfdaIE9X5/view?usp=sharing))

\* Required

1. Email address \*

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2. Your full name: \*

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3. Age at time of data collection: \*

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4. Length of time involved in climate organizing (in years and/or months): \*

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5. Participating in the research workshops gave me a deeper understanding of my personal experience of climate grief. \*

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly Disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

6. I would have interest in attending the following types of sessions:

Check all that apply.

- A drop-in, follow up session in the next two weeks (discussing themes that came up for us in the workshops)
- A structured workshop on spirituality and climate/political grief.
- A structured workshop on climate grief and our connection to land/nature.
- A structured workshop on identifying your deeper purpose for organizing.

### Personal Reflection Questions

For the next two questions please take as much (or as little!) space as you would like in order to reflect.

Feel free to write creatively and in any format (e.g. poetry or prose). If you would like to reflect using art or sound (e.g. recording your response or drawing a picture) you are invited to do so as well. Please upload any audio or visual responses below or email directly to the researcher ([ggelderm@ualberta.ca](mailto:ggelderm@ualberta.ca)).

7. Did participating in the workshops deepen your sense of connection (either to yourself, others, the world around you). If so, how? \*

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8. What things stuck out for you most during your experience in the workshops? (e.g. parts you found surprising, challenging, powerful) \*

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9. What do you feel you are taking away from this experience? (e.g. insights, new perspectives, next steps). \*

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10. Please upload audio or visual reflections here.

Files submitted:

**Thank you so much for your thoughtful responses and your participation in this study!**

If you have any questions or would like a copy of your responses, please email the researcher at [ggelderm@ualberta.ca](mailto:ggelderm@ualberta.ca).

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Google Forms

Appendix D

Group Métissages

**Narrative Métissage #1**

By Alison McIntosh and Alyssa Adeana Tonnes

I didn't ask for this.

It might sound childish, but I don't think I would choose this if I had a choice. And yet, here I am.

-----

I have many types of grief. Grief over lost things. Dead pets. Friendships that faded. Places and nostalgia all wrapped in one like a favourite old comforting blanket now filled with snot. It's my snot. I'm crying on your shirt again for the thousandth time. "It'll be okay"..... Eventually? I don't know. I've been here and not here for as long as I can remember.

The timeline is fuzzy but I love its construction.

-----

In my body I feel a lot of anxiety. I feel it as waves, sometimes lapping around my ankles, sometimes bearing down on me and sweeping me under. Even though it ebbs and flows, it never goes away. Sometimes, I wish it would.

I can't remember a time before anxiety, but I can remember a time before climate anxiety. I did not suffer less when I was worried about other things. I will not suffer less if I become a bystander to the climate crisis.

-----

So why does it hurt still. I thought I was over this and the clock runs out but I have so much more to say and so much more to do and the clock keeps ticking ticking ticking it's going to run out why am I trapped staring into the abyss of sand contained within this fragile hourglass that contains all the time in the universe I spent... ignoring its march forward. I can't erase it but maybe I can... shift it, next time? Is that arrogance, to think I can be something bigger than myself? Isn't climate change connected to everything else too? We are connected in more ways than one. Grief is grief is grief is anger is despair is

anger is optimism and determination and righteousness and foolhardiness and. We'll see, yet.

After all, I cried today. Maybe tomorrow I won't.

-----

When I think about climate bystanders, I think about Rick. Rick is my mom's friend's "boyfriend," although I think he is in his late 50s or early 60s.

I hate Rick. He's a bore, and last Christmas I found out that he is a climate denier. He knows the climate crisis is real, and he knows people caused it. However, he, like many shitty older whites, think that there's just nothing we can, or even should, do about it. He is firmly entrenched in the new climate denial that renders individuals impotent and pardons oil companies and capitalists. These people – and there are a lot of them – think that the costs of taking action are simply too high, and we are too far along.

These people fill me with rage because by and large they are the ones who got us here. Older people who didn't take the early warning signs seriously enough. People who didn't listen when scientists and activists sounded the alarm literally decades ago. And these people have benefitted so much from the systems that got us here – the same systems that have literally killed to keep themselves going. Rick has a comfortable life, and seems to live without the roiling waves of climate anxiety that feel like my life force. And so I despise his complacency, his ignorance, his lack of remorse. Fuck that guy.

-----

What have I lost, really? It's vast. I can't use metaphor. It's a damn hyperobject. Who can imagine something so massive? One remembers the original meaning of the word "awesome"- to be filled with awe. I am filled with many emotions. I can flick past them all and come back as needed- it's a well-worn book and yet some of the pages are written in French. I have been learning French for YEARS. Why don't I know the words? Aist na krishe. A well beloved song. Memories and tidings of other times. My time.

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I feel like I – we – live on a precipice. Like we're all on a boat at the top of the wave, hovering nearer or farther to a tipping point that will see us crashing down into the trough.

Although it is, at times, overwhelming, these feelings give me purpose. Although I resent being alive with the knowledge that the way things are is not the way they had to be, I feel a calling to do everything in my power to change them.

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What was the question?

Yes.

I am alive.

It feels... overall? It's good to be alive.

-----

Being alive in the world right now also feels like a call to action. Being alive in the world right now feels like a tremendous opportunity to build the world I do actually want to live in. Being alive in the world right now makes me feel angry and sad. Being alive in the world right now is all that I have.

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## Narrative Métissage #2

By Mónica Figueroa and Juan Felipe Vargas Alba

Being alive in this world is like sailing through a river that will eventually reach a precipice. The river flows rapidly and while you're inside it feels like there's no stopping it. Sometimes, I stop rowing against the current because my arms get tired. Sometimes, the end feels so close that I just need to enjoy the view before the inevitable fall. Most people don't want to accept the fact that we all will die at the end of this river. Older people will tell me: "this river has been flowing straight ahead all my life, and it will continue flowing forever". But this of-course is not true.

In school I learned about rivers. Rivers are born in the mountains, they flow through valleys, they get deeper and shallower, they feed lakes, and some of them make it all the way to the ocean. But they do not flow forever. I try to tell the other people in the boat about this. I try to tell them that the river we are in right now leads to the greatest waterfall they can ever imagine, but they have decided to ignore the existence of waterfalls all together.

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I want to do more. But I can't do it all. The opportunity cost of organizing is struck again by being one single person, suffering from knowing it all and doing none of it. Maybe this is what it means to be an imposter. people haven't figured out that you're just as lost as they are.

Grieving the arrival of a death foretold.

People back home are being murdered daily for work I haven't even come close to achieving. Their socially distant processions are cut short.

Pats on the back go right through me. I haunt the halls of my insecurity. I wish I could haunt Kenney, Chevron, BarrickGold. Goblins, ghouls, poltergeists of the world destroying for fun and profit.

Quarter me and pull me apart, each one of me will come back to do what one couldn't.

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Two years ago I met some people who also saw what lies ahead of us. We got together in a canoe and we rowed together. We rowed hard, persistently. We invited other people to row with us and they listened. It felt like we could change the tide by changing ourselves. If we rowed hard enough, everyone would listen and do the same. Suddenly, the world did change, but in a way we never expected. Now only one or two people could be in a

canoe at once, or we all would sink. So we split up, and kept rowing. But rowing alone isn't easy. And I often get tired.

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the bell tolls for melancolía  
It is an Egotistical and Resentful sound

The scariest part of grief is knowing that maybe you'd feel different had you changed one action.

Leave one day earlier

Leave one day later

Stay on the phone one more minute

Death becomes not a celebration of life, but an autopsy of your actions.

I didn't know I was the coroner until I found myself dissecting my failures.

I am the unjust one.

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I did my own research, and it turns out the river deviates ahead of us. There is a way to shift our course, and arrive at a beautiful lake. Unlike the river, this lake does not flow constantly, and we can just stay there, peacefully, steadily. But I shout to everyone around me and no one wants to take that path. The opening lies just a few kilometres ahead of us, and the river flows strong and fast. This opening is also narrow, and we have a lot of canoes to get through. If we don't act right now, all the water around us will collapse into a spectacular splash. And I already hear the sound of the water clashing with the rock.

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I eat an avocado. I would kill for more. I have. —

Green gold for gringos cuts down people, palma, loro, for some multinational chance to mine oro.

Agua pasó por aquí, cate que no te vi

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### Narrative Métissage # 3

By Laura Kruse, Carter Gorzitz, and Yara Cabral-Seixas

When I was a little girl, I was obsessed with Kratts' Creatures. A kids show about animals, their habitat. Climate change. I was obsessed with littering. I got so mad at my dad when he threw a candy wrapper out of the window. He was smoking with us in the car, and my mom got mad at him when we came home and she kissed our heads and could smell the smoke. Those were always fun trips. A stop at McDonalds on the way to Loblaws. My dad always got to be fun. I used to tell my mom if they ever got divorced I would move with him. She didn't get to be the fun parent.

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To hunt grouse was to build connection, both with my father, and with the foothills. But what do you do when both your father and your foothills are poisoned by the same men?

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2021. Approximately 9 years before the 2030 agenda is here.

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Every night, me and my dad would have a "lie down". He would lay beside my little twin bed, and read a book to me and we would play a game where I would draw a picture on his back and he would guess what it was. My dad read me a Berenstain Bears book about jobs you could have. There was one about being "an environmentalist" which entailed leaning out of a helicopter with a megaphone, yelling at people littering. This was going to be MY job. I held my breath by idling cars. I turned off the taps. When we would drive by a manufacturing plant, I would get so upset, watching the smoke curl out of the stack.

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To be alive in the world right now feels being stuck in a buffet in a gas station in Nevada, knowing that oblivion is near. There are vast amounts of options, choices, directions, and temptations available, but at the same time, each and every one of them is predicated on the fact that you must ignore the world collapsing around you, in order to enjoy the many indulgent splendour.

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I remember my dad explaining to me that money wasn't real. I was probably 7. He always overexplained things, added too much information. He told me that money had no

inherent value. That Holland used to use tulip bulbs for currency, and then the economy crashed when coins were introduced. That a certain polynesian people (I can't remember which) traded these giant stones. One fell to the ocean as it was being transported, but even there on the ocean floor, they still traded it.

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to have both the boundless possibilities of progression and growth,  
and the deep and harrowing reality of the foundation of the material world decaying  
around us.

seeing both the ever increasing connection of community, identity, solidarity, learning,  
compassion  
seeing the ever increasing exploitation  
Is cruelty

seeing both the bounties of which modernity offers  
and the violence and pain which it presents

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More than being scared, angry, sad or grieving, just BE until the end. There is no feeling  
of being alive. There only is BEING alive. The feeling is secondary, especially when it's  
not up to you. You can live, you can die, you can do whatever you want, but in the end it  
will only happen what has to be. Everything is gonna be as you chose your destiny to be  
before coming here.

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I remember reading a little field book that was illustrated in those beautiful scientific  
illustrations with the latin names under them. "Animals in North America." I told my dad  
"I wish we lived in North America" and he said we did, and I didn't believe him until he  
pulled out a globe and showed me the continents. I also learned that Europe wasn't a  
country.

I asked my dad why we didn't just use wind energy. It didn't make sense to use oil.  
"There's renewable energy, why can't we just use that? Why aren't cars electric?" My  
dad tried to explain, but I guess children don't understand lobbying. They know it's  
unfair, they can feel it in their gut.

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I've lived only eighteen years. I don't think human existence is that important to Earth and  
so I've pretty much given up on it. Instead of being depressed, the world has its phases  
and it's the end of one right as we write.



I don't think humanity is ready to reverse global warming or the 6th mass extinction but honestly if that's what's written in the stars then so be it. Everything happens because it is supposed to happen.

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What does it feel like to be alive right now? It feels like being at my dad's wake. Other people were crying, and I couldn't feel anything. I couldn't cry for months.

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My imagined future that is visceral is the potential layers of systematically induced pain and suffering and death,  
And in retaliation i can muster nothing more than blurring imaginations of my nieces smiling, or playing,  
or vague and kind encounters on the bus

It is hard to imagine a kind future, when the ground is being poisoned

Being compassionate has a bitter taste when the need for compassion is growing exponentially. To fight a fight that feels as if it has been lost hurts.

To grow in understanding or compassion is to hurt more, and become more hopeless in the face of the growth we all need.

Are we all just full of grief, grief which can be folded into so many different spaces, and tucked away under so many different distractions, or opportunities.

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The climate crisis is happening whether we want it or not. The world is having a heart attack. There's nothing much we can do other than slowing down the process and making things softer, easier, but at the same time how is that going to help the final outcome? Everything will happen because it has to happen.

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As my dad was in the hospital in his final moments, I stood outside the emergency room and had a cigarette. I wonder if my mom could smell it in my hair when she hugged me.

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