THE UNSAID: WHEN CLIMATE CHANGE HITS HOME

by

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We accept this thesis as conforming
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Abstract

This study uses an in-depth Dialogic Relational Interview method to explore how six residents who experienced flooding in their homes engaged with the 2013 Calgary flood as a climate-change event. Drawing on the theory and methods of psychoanalysis and discursive psychology, transcript analysis revealed an underlying pattern of inconsistent and unstable engagement. Participants held split narratives of climate change (weather weirding and apocalyptic loss); employed defensive interpretative strategies that disavowed the reality of the flood as a climate-change event; and invested in identity narratives that functioned to keep climate change unspoken. These findings suggest that participants may be living in a culture of disavowal, wherein certain aspects of reality are acknowledged, while other aspects are disowned. Based on this and other recent research, a framework for climate-change engagement is presented. It emphasizes supporting audiences to face the realities of climate change by focusing on authentic engagement and expanding climate-change identities.

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Acknowledgements

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May this work be of benefit to all sentient beings. Ki Ki So So!

Chapter One: Introduction

"*Though knowing the truth, he may act as if it did not exist*"

Fenichel (as cited in Cramer, 2006, p.43).

The journey for my thesis began in late June 2013. At the time, I was deeply embroiled

in schoolwork, reading papers on the psychology of climate-change engagement and busily

preparing to depart for a three-week school residency. Within the course of a few hours, my

world shifted as the worst flood in Calgary's history swept through the city. A giant low-

pressure system had gotten stuck over the Southern Alberta foothills, leading to an intense 24-

hour-period of rain directly over the Bow River basin—the headwaters for both the Bow and

Elbow rivers that flow through the city. To make matters worse, the rains were also melting the

mountain snowpack, adding to the volume of water collecting in streams and rivers (*Calgary*

Herald, 2013). News media and citizen journalists alike captured and shared thousands of

surreal images of floating homes, twisting roads and the devastation of places that were

intimately familiar to me. In the end, the Southern Alberta floods led to death, billions of dollars

of damage and the evacuation of more than 100,000 Calgarians from their properties. While

most of these people have returned, some are still waiting to return; others, unable to afford the

cost of repairs, have walked away completely from their homes.

In the days and months following the flood, a number of environmental organizations,

journalists and academics began linking it to climate change. They spoke about the flood as a

wake-up call to the realities of climate change and predicted that extreme weather events like

these were likely to become more frequent and more severe (Hildebrandt, June 28, 2013; Suzuki,

2013; The Canadian Press, 2013). As Calgary shifted focus from disaster recovery to flood-

mitigation planning, an observable moment emerged when the seriousness of climate-change loss, and the deeper implications of changing our way of life, might have become a topic of personal and public discussion. For the most part, this has not happened.

Provincial government communications such as the *Flood Recovery Framework* (Government of Alberta, 2013) stated that "our goal is to ensure Alberta and our communities can return to some normalcy, what we often call 'business as usual', as quickly as possible" (p. 2) and failed to address climate change in any way. Local municipal leaders seemed equally reticent to talk about climate change in relation to the flood. For example, a local Council member claimed "the battle will not be won by talking to people about climate change" (Gian-Carlo Carra, personal communication, August 31, 2013). My own experience was also to tread lightly with the topic. Talking about climate change can be met with mixed reactions in Calgary, Alberta: the seat of Canada's oil, gas, and tar sands activities. As well, climate change felt besides the point in light of the immediate tragedy people had endured.

While it appeared that public discussion of climate change was not transitioning outside of special interest groups and into the sphere of general public discourse, a number of research firms published evidence that Albertans had indeed made a connection. One study stated that "three in five Albertans (59%) believe climate change played a role in the flood, and a majority (53%) admit that the event, along with other natural disasters that have recently occurred worldwide, has impacted their view of global warming" (Insights West, 2013). Two more nation-wide surveys also produced similar results, though Alberta numbers trailed the national average (GlobeScan Incorporated, 2014; Ipsos, 2013).

Although the survey research captures how many people have made a connection between the flood and climate change, it does little to explain the seeming paradox between their awareness of the issue and their individual and social (dis)engagement with climate change. While some Albertans may believe there is a connection between the floods and climate change, it seems that we live our lives as though we do not know, or we do not need to know. While popular voices prolifically declare that the floods have changed our lives forever, climate-change loss and actually *changing* our way of life seems to be largely left unsaid and our leaders seem reticent to address these issues.

It was against this backdrop that I began to wonder if Albertans were drawing a connection between the flood and climate change. I wondered how people engaged with the flood as a climate-change event, if at all. Frankly, I wondered, in the face of such personal and likely recurring devastation, how the flood victims could be silent about climate change.

Research Focus and Questions

The purpose of this thesis project is three-fold: (a) to explore the apparent contradictions between believing that climate change has something to do with the flood, yet continuing our way of life as though it had nothing to do with it; (b) to explore how Calgarians collectively keep global climate change unspoken, even as it floods into our homes and community; and (c) to explore how these insights might support environmental communicators and educators to engage Calgarians in the difficult discussions of the realities of climate change (Moser, 2012a, p. 3).

I have framed my research to explore how residents who have experienced flooding in their homes engage with the flood as a climate-change event. Looking beneath the surface of what individuals report in surveys, I was interested in whether residents were drawing a

connection between the flood and climate change? How did they engage with the

flood as a climate-change event? What might we learn from the stories they told, and how they

made meaning? Specifically, the research project aims to address the following questions:

1. What discourses and interpretive repertoires do residents who have experienced flooding

    in their homes draw on to make meaning of the flood and the flood as a climate-change

    event? What patterns, associations and relationships are used to construct them?

2. What emotional or psychological function might these interpretations perform? In what

    way do these interpretations mobilize unconscious defense mechanisms and form

    interpretive strategies?

3. How are residents' meaning-making and interpretive strategies connected to external

    social influences? How do victims of flooding collaborate to construct available or

    unspoken discourses?

The Unsaid: Why This Matters

What is left unsaid about climate change matters for many reasons. It deeply influences

how we make meaning of extreme weather as the unfolding reality of climate change (Billig,

1999b; Norgaard, 2011; Randall, 2009; Wetherell, Taylor, & Yates, 2001a). It limits our social

imagination of the realities of climate change and what is needed to cut emissions (Moser,

2012a; Norgaard, 2011, p. 208; Shove, 2010, p. 1282). It encourages the continued suppression

of anxieties and fears related to climate change (Hamilton & Kasser, 2009, p. 6; Hoggett, 2013;

Weintrobe, 2013a). It locates the problem within individuals rather than the society we live in

(Hoggett, 2013, p. 57; Shove, 2010). It also supports ineffective communication practices that

assume individuals lack information or concern, when in fact they may be paralyzed by the size

of the problem and what is at stake (Lertzman, 2008, 2013b, 2014; Mnguni, 2010;

Moser, 2007; Norgaard, 2011, p. 74; Randall, 2009; Stoll-Kleemanna, O'Riordanb, & Jaegera,

2001; Weintrobe, 2013a).

      If environmental communicators, educators and policy developers are to move beyond

"business as usual" (Government of Alberta, 2013, p. 2) and support more meaningful discussion

about the realities of climate change—or discussion of it at all—we must develop a deeper

understanding of the complex and underlying structures of how we make meaning, and what

may be working to activate silence around certain aspects of climate change. As such,

understanding human responses to climate change is as important as understanding climate

change itself. Understanding how citizens make meaning of the flood as a climate-change event,

and how they engage with that meaning, is essential to supporting them to face the realities of

climate change and what is needed to cut emissions in the future (Moser, 2012a; Norgaard, 2011;

Randall, 2009). Specifically, understanding *how* citizens come to not discuss the *flood as a*

climate-change event is critical to climate-change engagement work in Calgary. It is within this

context that I situate the need for this thesis project.

      At a time when toolkits and solution narratives predominate, this research takes a step

back and examines how people that have experienced trauma and loss at a local level relate to

their experience as a climate-change event. Specifically, it aims to explore the relationship of

inner forces of emotion and unconscious processes and outer forces of social discourse and social

context on engagement. By using psychosocial concepts and principles to explore how

individuals may engage with these topics, this research is placed in a "'third position'"—neither

strictly individual nor social—and instead situates psychic and social realities side by side

(Weintrobe, 2013a, p. 3). As such, this research project finds its place in the emerging

interdisciplinary domain of psychosocial research, climate change psychology and climate-

change engagement.

       While some studies address the current state of climate denial (Hoggett, 2013; Lertzman,

2008; Norgaard, 2011; Randall, 2009; Weintrobe, 2013a), there is a call for more research about

how local experiences influence engagement with global climate change (Reser & Swim, 2011).

There is also a call for different perspectives on why the knowledge of climate change reality

may be resisted and how this knowledge may be incorporated into climate-change preparation,

communication and engagement (Clayton, Manning, & Hodge, 2014; Lertzman, 2014; Moser,

2012a; Stoll-Kleemanna et al., 2001; Weintrobe, 2013a). As Lertzman states: "There have been

few notable contributions to the role defense mechanisms have in how climate change issues are

negotiated" (2014, p. 21). By moving past what people think and believe about climate change

and *why* climate change is a problem, and instead asking questions about how we are

constructing meaning and engaging with the realities of climate change, I hope this research

contributes to a more complex perspective that supports practitioners in their efforts to

effectively engage the public. Moreover, I expect this study to raise valuable questions to be

explored in future research.

Assumptions and Limitations

       This research project is built on four primary assumptions. First, unconscious, affective,

intra-psychic and emotional aspects influence our (dis)engagement with climate change

(Lertzman, 2013b; Moser, 2007; Randall, 2009; Stoll-Kleemanna et al., 2001; Weintrobe,

2013a). Second, our engagement with climate change is not solely an individual cognitive and

behavioural activity, but rather an emergence of the connection between the inner

dimensions of individuals and the outer society in which they live (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009;

Hoggett, 2013; Lertzman, 2014; Norgaard, 2011; Randall, 2009; Weintrobe, 2013a). Third, what

is spoken creates available public discourses of climate change, and, in this way, constructs our

lived reality. At the same time, we influence available public discourses by collaborating to keep

disturbing topics unspoken (Billig, 1999a; Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). Finally, this project

assumes a causal link between extreme weather events like the flood, and climate change.

Though climate change can only be determined through the analysis of long-term trends, this

assumption is consistent with scientists' projections that flooding and drought are likely

indications of things to come (Barrow & Yu, 2005; IPCC, 2012; Leiserowitz, 2007).

A limitation of this study is that it does not analyse communications, media narratives

and government policies related to the flooding. While a complete analysis of the orders of

discourse related to the topic would offer great value and further insight, it is beyond the scope of

this study. Secondly, it is important to note that I am not a psychoanalytic practitioner. I am an

interdisciplinary researcher and am offering my personal subjective reflections on the

experiences of the participants that I interviewed. While my reflections are theoretically

informed, I can never really know what they were thinking or feeling. As such, my analysis is

offered as possibilities, suppositions and subjectivities, and with the best of intentions.

Overview of Remaining Chapters

The remainder of this thesis unfolds over six chapters. Chapter Two examines the

literature that supports and provides context for my research project. Chapter Three provides an

overview of the research project and an in-depth description of the theory and methods used to

capture data and analyze the results. Chapter Four offers a series of brief pen portraits

to introduce and situate the participants of the study. Chapter Five provides an in-depth look at

the evidence, data analysis and results. Chapter Six discusses the findings in the broader context

of climate-change engagement and offers recommendations for Calgary-based communications

practitioners. Chapter Seven, the concluding chapter, offers my perspective on the implications

of this work for the field of environmental education and communications.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

"The impacts of global warming on human society are predicted to be widespread and

potentially catastrophic" (Norgaard, 2011, p. 81).

Introduction

The connection between inner and outer worlds lies at the heart of how Calgarians, and the society in which they live, engage with the flood as a climate-change event. How we come to make meaning, take care, and take action, are influenced both by the stories and identities available to us, as well as our need to protect vulnerable parts of ourselves (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002; Randall, 2009). Both of these factors give rise to the investment in certain stories and identities rather than others, making us both active and passive social agents in climate-change engagement (Billig, 1999b; Norgaard, 2011; Randall, 2009; Wetherell, Taylor, & Yates, 2001b). Notions of connection, investment, agency and meaning-making are at the heart of psychosocial theory (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009) and provide the home for both this research project and the literature that informs and contextualizes it.

The following chapter discusses climate-change engagement by drawing on five main bodies of theory: (a) current research on the psychology of climate-change impacts, (b) popular approaches to climate-change engagement, (c) psychoanalytic perspectives on climate-change engagement, (d) Norgaard's (2011) theory of the *social organization of climate change denial* and (e) the field of discursive psychology as a means to study how (dis)engagement is accomplished.

Psychological Impacts of Climate Change

Climate change will not be painless. Literature points to a prolonged period of uncertainty based on two possible scenarios: either we have done too little too late and are headed for a tipping point into an unknown world of simultaneously degrading social, economic and environmental systems (Moser, 2012a; O'Neill & Nicholson-Cole, 2009); or we act quickly to decarbonize our lives completely and deal with the deep implications of changing our way of life and lagging climate-change impacts (Moser, 2012b, p.3; Shove, 2010). Either way, climate-change impacts will, and do, move beyond infrastructure and systems, and have profound effects on human psychology and our sense of wellbeing (Clayton et al., 2014; Doherty & Clayton, 2011; Shove, 2010).

The complex causes and impacts of global climate change are a blend between natural disasters and technological disasters, and prompt a range of psychological responses associated with both types of events (Doherty & Clayton, 2011, p. 268). Studies show that psychological responses to extreme weather events range from post-traumatic stress to depression to somatic disorders, as well as increased incidences of violence and domestic abuse (Clayton et al., 2014; Doherty & Clayton, 2011). Edelstein's (2004) environmental psychosocial theory of *shifting lifescapes* provides insight into the scale and depth of psychological response effected by disaster. Though his research is based on coping responses to toxic contamination, it demonstrates how all-encompassing victim disaster response can be. His work frames adjustment to disaster exposure as lifescape change*,* where lifescape is "the framework of understanding that governs our perception of normal life" (p. 65). He contends that lifescape is the underlying premise around which life is organized and is central to our psychological well-

being. Following a disaster, Edelstein found that people experience fundamental shifts

to five areas of their lifescape: their sense that the environment is benign, optimism about their

health, and diminished senses of personal control, security and social trust.

        Though less severe, even indirect impacts of climate change, such as viewing media

images of environmental degradation and human suffering, result in anxiety and uncertainty

about the scale of current and future risks and feelings of guilt and shame about our complicit

lifestyle choices (Doherty & Clayton, 2011; Weintrobe, 2013a). Similarly, adaptation and

mitigation measures give rise to increasing burdens of stress, anxiety and depression as we

witness changes to aspects of life that we hold dear (Clayton et al., 2014; Moser, 2012a; Shove,

2010). Weintrobe (2013a) argues that our anxiety response to climate change is evoked by deep-

seated denial over our need for a healthy bio-sphere, facing the loss of a predictable future,

inefficacy of those in leadership roles to sufficiently act to protect us, and our own dread of

having to give up our sense of material entitlement. Norgaard's (2011) research demonstrates

many of these emotional aspects; she found that even thinking about climate change was linked

to feelings of fear of loss of security, feelings of helplessness and guilt, fear of being a bad

person, and a sense of threat to individual and collective senses of identity.

        In summary, research shows that the implications of climate change impacts are not

simply external to us: they are internal as well. They move past systems and infrastructure, and

profoundly influence our psychology and sense of well-being (Clayton et al., 2014; Doherty &

Clayton, 2011; Moser, Williams, & Boesch, 2012). Specifically, climate change impacts evoke

troubling emotions of fear, anxiety, shame, guilt and grief over loss (Doherty & Clayton, 2011;

Lertzman, 2008, 2013b; Norgaard, 2011; Randall, 2009; Weintrobe, 2013a). Even though a

growing body of literature addresses the social and psychological impacts of climate

change, predominant modes of climate change engagement often overlook the deep emotionality

of the topic. The following section provides a brief overview of dominant approaches to climate-

change engagement, and offers perspectives on why these approaches fail to evoke the change

we need.

A Limited Landscape of Environmental Engagement

As *engagement* is a primary focus of this research, it is useful to be clear about how I

have conceptualized and used this term. Within the context of this project, a state of engagement

is understood to be "a personal state of connection with the issue of climate change…

concurrently comprising cognitive, affective and behavioural aspects. In other words, it is not

enough for people to know about climate change in order to be engaged; they also need to care

about it, be motivated and able to take action" (Lorenzoni, Nicholson-Cole, & Whitmarsh, 2007,

p. 446). Though being able to take action is not as straightforward as motivation alone.

Bandura's (1995) theory of self efficacy holds that people's *belief* in their capability to act is

central to their personal agency. He writes: "Efficacy beliefs influence how people think, feel,

motivate themselves, and act" (Bandura, 1995, p. 2). As such, believing one can bring about

change has a strong influence on whether one takes action (Bandura, 1994; Kollmuss &

Agyeman, 2002).

For decades, communicators and educators have operated under the premise that if

people only knew better, they would act better (Kelsey & Dillon, 2005; Lakoff, 2010; Lertzman,

2008). Often used to the exclusion of other practices, two popular approaches to research and

engagement around climate change that support this notion include cognitive-behavioural theory

and risk theory. Cognitive-behavioural theory takes at face value what individuals

report about their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours, and assumes a causal link between

information processing and decision-making (Lertzman, 2014). This type of understanding of

engagement conceptualizes human behavior as predictable and typically results in the use of

behaviour-change tools, for example community-based social marketing, levers, incentives and

toolkits. When the target of these behaviouristic interventions fail to act accordingly, the notion

of a *gap* between what people say and what they do helps to explain away discrepancies

(Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002; Lertzman, 2014; Stoll-Kleemanna et al., 2001). A second

variation of this approach is what Shove (2010) describes as the *ABC Paradigm* – attitude,

behavior and choice. In this version of cognitive-behaviour engagement, social change depends

on changing attitudes that drive individual behaviour. Focus is placed on influencing individual

choice, rather than changing the many institutions that structure possible courses of action.

A second relevant approach to engagement is *risk theory*, which uses extreme weather

events as *wake-up calls* (Hopkins, 2013; Leiserowitz, 2007; Leiserowitz, Maibach, Roser-

Renouf, & Smith, 2010; Lorenzoni et al., 2007; Whitmarsh, 2008). However, a number of

studies show that fear and risk appeals ineffectively engage audiences (Moser, 2007; Norgaard,

2006; O'Neill & Nicholson-Cole, 2009). While the approach may attract attention, risk

communication theory suggests that it is not the perceived relevant threat that precipitates action,

but rather the ability to do something about the risk (Bandura, 1995; Bostrom & Lashof, 2007;

Reser & Swim, 2011). As well, most people do not feel climate change poses a personal threat

because they are removed by space and time (Leiserowitz, 2007; Lorenzoni et al., 2007; Randall,

2009). The unintended consequence of ignoring the emotional response to risk and fear

campaigns is that rather than trying to control external sources of fear, in this case

climate change, we may instead try to control sources of fear internally through mechanisms of

denial and apathy (Lertzman, 2008; Moser, 2007; Norgaard, 2011; O'Neill & Nicholson-Cole,

2009, p. 363).

The information-deficit model does little to account for the significant number of people

who do know about climate change but do little to translate this knowledge into action or

concern (Norgaard, 2011; Stoll-Kleemanna et al., 2001). Current work within environmental

psychosocial studies calls us to move beyond notions of information, the gap, individual

behaviour change, fear and risk, and into more nuanced explorations of human experience and

emotion (Hoggett, 2013; Lertzman, 2013b; Randall, 2009; Weintrobe, 2013a). The following

section discusses how psychosocial research (and a psychoanalytic approach specifically)

provides a different viewpoint from which to consider climate change engagement.

A Different View: Why We Resist Climate Change

Rather than a gap, a psychoanalytic perspective considers a possible "tangle" of conflicts,

ambivalence and unconscious defenses that influence how we make meaning and how we

engage with the traumatic aspects of becoming aware of climate change science (Hoggett, 2013;

Lertzman, 2012; 2014, p. 3; Weintrobe, 2013a). Being able to bear troubling emotions,

especially anxiety, is a critical part of being able to bear reality (Weintrobe, 2013a). Lertzman

(2008, 2013) and others have reframed our resistance to thinking and talking about climate

change as not a problem of caring too little, but one where we care too much and are paralyzed

by the troubling emotions evoked by the size of the problem and what is at stake (Lertzman,

2012, p. 146; 2013b; Moser, 2007; Randall, 2009; Weintrobe, 2013a). Specifically, a

psychoanalytic perspective argues that our resistance to troubling emotions is our

natural response to anxiety or fear, as McWilliams (1994b) explains:

> The person whose behavior manifests defensiveness is generally trying unconsciously to
>
> accomplish one or both of the following ends: the avoidance or management of some
>
> powerful, threatening feeling, usually anxiety but sometimes overwhelming grief and
>
> other disorganizing emotional experiences; and the maintenance of self-esteem. (p. 97)

Psychoanalysis holds that with change comes the unknown and anxiety about our

survival (Weintrobe, 2013a). It recognizes that our response to anxiety is primarily unconscious

and that the unconscious mind influences our construction of social realities: specifically,

feelings and emotions shape our perception and motivation, constructing the way in which we

perceive (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009, p. 6; Weintrobe, 2013a). As Weintrobe (2013a) explains:

> Psychoanalytic ideas also extend our ordinary understanding of what it means to think in
>
> a rational way. We may 'think' something intellectually while not being emotionally
>
> connected to it and not seeing it as something to do with us personally. Our thoughts
>
> may be distorted by unconscious processes which include defenses against knowing what
>
> we feel and think as a way of protecting ourselves from facing 'too much reality'. (p. 6)

In other words, because emotions are difficult to control directly, "the main way of

controlling one's emotions is to *exert control over one's thoughts* (Rosenburg, 1991, as cited in

Norgaard, 2011, p.90 [emphasis added]). In this way, defending against or resisting climate

change typically manifests in one of three ways: pretending that the problem is not there, the

problem is not as big as it might appear, or it is someone else's responsibility (Bichard, 2013;

Hamilton & Kasser, 2009; Lertzman, 2008; Norgaard, 2006, 2011; O'Neill &

Nicholson-Cole, 2009; Randall, 2009; Stoll-Kleemanna et al., 2001; Weintrobe, 2013a).

Denial is a commonly used resistance and is perhaps the most common defense

mechanism cited in association with climate change. It is used to get rid of things that we have

already seen, "if only dimly or out of the corner of one eye" (Weintrobe, 2013a, p. 36). While

different scholars define the mental operations of denial in different ways, it typically involves

techniques that minimize or maximize—misfortunes are downplayed and successes are expanded

upon—and distort the meaning of events or reverse their affective dimensions (Cramer, 2006, p.

44; McWilliams, 1994b; Weintrobe, 2013a). For example, Stoll-Kleemanna et al. (2001) found

that people may profess anxiety over climate change, but harbour internal resentment or denial

over what they cannot accept as a justifiable change in behaviour. In the case of Norgaard's

(2011) work, denial was "carried out through the use of stock strategies and social narratives

employed to achieve selective attention, perspectival selectivity and the stopping of thought" (p.

213). Randall's (2009) work holds that the division of climate change loss into parallel narratives

of problems and solutions is a denial strategy that saves us from facing and mourning the loss

involved with true and realistic change.

Weintrobe's (2013a) writings on climate change anxiety suggest that more so than denial,

disavowal may be the most prevalent and dangerous defense response to climate change. She

explains that disavowal unconsciously and systematically *distorts information* in order to *defend*

against the emotions of grief and loss. Its central aim is to block mourning at the stage before

sadness sets in (Weintrobe, 2013a). Rather than negating reality altogether, disavowal allows

reality to be seen and not seen at the same time. In this way, climate-change reality may be

acknowledged, but the anxiety associated with it is split off and unacknowledged. To

accomplish this, Weintrobe explains that anxiety is "systematically gotten rid of through a range

of 'quick fixes'" (p. 39), though centrally through the quick fixes of minimizing, projection or

distortion. As an example, climate change loss may only be felt by future generations and,

consequently, it retains little significance to us now. Hoggett (2013) writes:

> Faced with an unpalatable reality, Freud suggested that we may resort to one of two
>
> mechanisms – outright rejection, where we simply do not see what is in front of us, and
>
> disavowal, where one part of the mind sees while the other discounts what is seen. (p. 57)
>
> Further, Weintrobe (2013) holds that the use of disavowal leads to a vicious cycle

because it does little to address the real causes of anxiety, leading to escalating anxiety, which

necessarily requires further disavowal (p. 39).

In summary, continuing down a path of engagement that offers up increasingly disturbing

climate-change information may only function to strengthen individual and collective defensive

strategies in an attempt to defend against the anxiety-provoking realities of climate change.

Instead, we must consider how to support people to engage with climate change in a way that

recognizes the emotional and unconscious aspects of accepting loss and change. Fundamental to

this approach is better understanding how climate change is resisted. The following section

considers how climate change is resisted in more detail and explores Norgaard's (2011) theory of

social denial.

Living in Climate Change Denial

One way to consider this research project is through the lens of Norgaard's (2011) work

on the social organization of climate-change denial, where norms of emotion, conversation and

attention interfere with thinking or talking about climate change in everyday life. In

the case of a small Norwegian town, Norgaard found that residents lived a paradox of both

knowing about climate change as well as not knowing about climate change, in what she calls a

"double reality" (p. 3). Norgaard's work shows that holding information at a distance was an

active denial strategy used to negotiate personal engagement with climate change. She noted

specifically that: "emotions played a key role in denial, providing much of the reason why people

preferred to avoid information" (Norgaard, 2006, p. 372). Norgaard's (2011) work showed that

people used a stock of social narratives to achieve "perspectival selectivity" and "selective

attention" (p. 174) in order to manage their emotions. This management was done in response to

social circumstances and carried out through a process of social interactions. At the heart of this

process is the notion that emotions that are personally uncomfortable are also uncomfortable

when they "violate norms of social interaction in the community" (p. 384). She explains:

> Data from Bygdaby tell a story about how the desire to manage troubling emotions
>
> becomes the driver for ignoring climate change and how cultural tools – including norms
>
> of space, time, emotions and conversation – together with discourses are used as
>
> mechanisms for successfully achieving that ignoring. To ignore something is essentially
>
> to manage emotion. (Norgaard, 2011, p. 197)

Norgaard's work demonstrates and documents the social origins and influences of

climate-change disengagement; however, it lacks empirical evidence that demonstrates the

mental processes involved in resisting climate change, as well as evidence of its psychoanalytic

underpinnings. The following section provides a theoretical perspective, based in discursive

psychology, of how repression and denial might actually function to keep certain

aspects of climate-change impacts unspoken.

Accomplishing Climate Change Resistance in Everyday Talk

        Discursive psychology is based on the analysis of everyday talk: what Billig (1999b)

refers to as "surface psychology" rather than the "depth psychology" of psychoanalysis (p. 38-

39). Processes that psychoanalysis might consider individual, internal and hidden, discursive

psychology instead considers as social, external and observable. It also aims to capture the

paradoxical relationship that exists between discourse and the speaking subject, by

acknowledging that people are simultaneously the products and the producers of discourse, "the

master and the slaves of language" (Wetherell et al., 2001a, pp. 190-191). In recognizing inner

influences, discursive psychology provides a bridge between the outward level of social

discourse and the inner level of emotion and unconscious (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 96;

Wetherell et al., 2001b). In this way, it provides a unique psychosocial lens to view individual

and social engagement with the 2013 Calgary flood as a climate-change event.

        Billig's (1999b) revision of Freudian repression provides a theoretical and

methodological tool to explore how Norgaard's (2011) theory of social denial actually functions

to repress thoughts and keep the topic of climate change, or certain aspects of climate change,

unspoken. While Freud's original concept envisaged repression as a biological means to deal

with "inborn drives of sex and aggression" (Billig, 1999b, p. 253), Billig's theory holds that

repressed desires reflect whatever is socially forbidden today and whatever may not be uttered.

As such, other topics besides sex and aggression may be repressed. For example, he points out

that the phrase "consumer society" (1999b, p. 256) seems to ignore the notion that what is

consumed must first be produced, so that the images associated with production—

namely, the miseries "of dark, busy fingers, working in conditions of oppression far removed

from my life-world" (Billig, 1999a; 1999b, p. 256)—are also pushed away from conscious

awareness.

Central to Billig's (2006) reformulation of Freudian repression is the notion that language

is repressive as well as expressive: words not only point towards an object of focus, they also

point away from an object of focus. In this way, discourse psychology links together

psychoanalysis and discourse analysis through Billig's notion of a *dialogic unconsciousness.*

Billig argues that the skills we use to open up topics of conversation can also be used to close

them down discursively: "the dialogic unconsciousness consists of statements that have been

repressed in specific social contexts" (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). As illustrated in Norgaard's

(2011) work, replacement narratives helped residents to change the subject and push away

conversations from the troublesome topic of that year's remarkably lighter snow pack. Billig

argues that repression depends on the skills of language. He points out that we push aside

troublesome thoughts just as we push aside troublesome topics of conversation. It is a social

skill learned just as we learn language: "what is not to be uttered must not even be thought.

Inner and outward taboos should coincide…" (Billig, 1999b, p. 259). In other words, in learning

to speak appropriately or politely, we also learn what is inappropriate or rude. Further,

language—written or spoken, internal or external—becomes a means of repression because we

avoid making the unspoken spoken both to others and to ourselves: "language, or rather

dialogue, provides the means for repression" (p. 67). For example, Randall's (2009) work on

parallel narratives of climate change—climate-change problems and climate-change solutions—

illustrates how discourse can function to keep climate change loss unspoken:

discussing terrifying future-oriented climate-change problems, or solutions where loss is

completely excised, the realities of climate-change loss are not expressed nor experienced.

In the context of climate-change communications, Billig's (1999b) theory provides a

valuable perspective on why climate-change discourse may not be transitioning into the sphere

of general public discourse. His theory suggests that the repression of climate change in

everyday talk maybe a learned behaviour adopted to avoid experiencing uncomfortable emotions

associated with climate change. At the same time, his theory also suggests that climate change

silence is a learned behaviour adopted to avoid the social taboo of making others feel

uncomfortable. Kahan (2012) argues similarly: "citizens are culturally polarized because they

are, in fact, too rational — at filtering out information that would drive a wedge between

themselves and their peers" (para. 5). Kahan argues that because being at odds with climate

science holds zero personal risk, yet being at odds with "those on whom they depend for social

and financial support" (para. 8) holds great personal risk, rational people will choose to not be in

conflict with their cultural group. In avoiding climate change taboos, speakers further certain

understandings of the world and exclude others. As such, repression has ideological

consequences that further work to strengthen social silence around climate change (Jørgensen &

Phillips, 2002).

Discursive psychology also provides an important perspective on the psychosocial

identity. Identity is treated as unstable and relational and focus is placed on processes of

meaning production in social interaction: "Discourses are treated as resources that are freely

available for use by people in constructing identities" (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 145). In

this way, narratives and discourses both position people in certain categories, and are available for people to position themselves within. As people choose and invest in a particular discourse from the range of available discourses, both consciously and unconsciously, psycho-social selves emerge (Billig, 2006; Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 145).

In summary, Billig's (1999b) theory of repression and dialogic unconsciousness link psychoanalysis and discourse analysis and provide a bridge from unconscious processes to the surface of everyday talk and text. In this way, discursive psychology provides a practical lens to investigate defense mechanisms and identity, and how both work to keep aspects of climate change unspoken.

Conclusion

The vocabulary of psychoanalysis varies between theorists, and the topics of denial, repression, and disavowal are not always clear (Weintrobe, 2013b). For the purpose of this thesis, I have come to view Billig's (1999b) conceptualization of repression—"pushing aside involved in simultaneously knowing and not knowing," (p. 27)—as similar to Weintrobe's (2013a) conceptualization of disavowal—"strategies that ensure that reality can be seen and not seen *at one and the same time*" (p. 38, emphasis in original)—as similar to Norgaard's (2011) conceptualization of a "double reality"—"the process through which climate change is kept out of the sphere of everyday life" (p. 123) because "people want to protect themselves a bit" (p. 4). All three concepts are rooted in the mental activity of psychic splitting, which is a powerful means to deal with complex, threatening problems (McWilliams, 1994a).

Current research on the psychology of climate-change impacts demonstrates that the complicated nature of climate change evokes responses related to both natural and technological

disaster. Impacts are likely to profoundly shift our previously held assumptions about

our life and future, as well as lead to stress, anxiety and depression. Leading psychoanalytic

thinkers believe that our resistance to climate-change information and behaviour change is not

because we care too little, but because we are overwhelmed by the size of the problem and what

is at stake. Specifically, they posit that such psychological responses as anxiety over our

dependence on nature, feelings of loss, a sense of abandonment or frustration with the lack of

support by leaders, and our own ambivalence and complicity, naturally give rise to the

employment of denial and disavowal strategies to control our emotions. By framing climate

change as an individual problem of human behaviour, some popular engagement practices may

actually increase the stress and anxiety associated with the realities of climate change, thus

strengthening individual and collective defensive strategies.

As an alternative, psychoanalytic thinkers suggest that we support people to engage with

climate change in a way that recognizes the emotional and unconscious aspects of accepting

change, and they urgently call for more in-depth research on the role defense mechanisms play in

how we resist and negotiate climate-change information. The following section provides an

overview of the research project and an in-depth description of the theory and methods used to

capture data and analyze the results.

Chapter Three: Research Methodology

"It is critical to highlight that loss, mourning, guilt and related experiences may not

actually be 'known' to the person, but may be operating at least conscious levels;

it is typically through conversation and interaction that such

dimensions can be more known." (Lertzman, 2014, p. 19)

Psychosocial Research Approach

Psychosocial studies—a social sciences discipline developed primarily in the United

Kingdom and European Union—provide both the theory and the method for this project. The

psychosocial approach used for this project emphasizes a psychoanalytical understanding of

human subjectivity and is distinct from other psychosocial orientations that may have different

views of the self and the unconscious. This view focuses "on the felt, lived experience of

climate change implications, and the traumatic aspects of becoming aware of climate change

science and threats" (Lertzman, 2014, p. 17). Theoretically, a psychosocial lens "conceptualizes

human subjects as, simultaneously, the products of their own unique psychic worlds and a shared

social world" (Hollway & Jefferson, 2013, p. xiii). It places emphasis on the meeting point of

inner and outer forces and resists the strict division between the individual and social,

considering them together, as intimately connected, something construct*ed* and construct*ing*

(Frosh, 2003; Hollway & Jefferson, 2013).

Complex questions of knowing about people, of meaning, identity, emotion and

unconscious defenses require methods that aim to "research beneath the surface*"* and beyond the

purely discursive (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009, p. 1). They require psychoanalytic approaches that

question our ability to be transparent to ourselves. Hollway and Jefferson (2013) refer to this as

the *defended subject*: "The shared starting point of all the different schools of

psychoanalytic thought is this idea of a dynamic unconscious that defends against anxiety and

significantly influences people's actions, lives and relations," (Hollway & Jefferson, 2013, p.

17).

In addition to psychoanalytic theory, the methods and analysis for this project draw on

critical discursive psychology. While also informed by some psychoanalytic theoretical

frameworks such as unconscious processes, discursive psychology eschews the notion that

defensive activity is a purely mysterious, unconscious activity that is always methodologically

out of reach. It argues that defensive activity is habitually and socially practised through

language and that researchers can see and hear speakers push aside or repress delicate topics of

conversation in talk and text (Billig, 1999b; Wetherell et al., 2001a, 2001b). In this way,

"psychoanalytical theory can be combined with discourse analysis in order to account for the

psychological mechanisms underpinning the 'unsaid' and people's selective investment in

particular discourses from the range of available discourses" (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p.

119). As such, discursive psychology provides an apt methodological lens to view how climate-

change engagement is practiced in everyday conversation. It accounts for both unconscious and

social dimensions, while also providing a means to make the unspoken visible.

While the two theoretical approaches—psychoanalytic and discursive psychology—are

epistemologically situated within psychosocial studies and recognize that unconscious drivers

influence our individual and social practices, they offer different perspectives on what is

considered data, and approach analysis in slightly different ways (Billig, 1999b; Jørgensen &

Phillips, 2002; Wetherell et al., 2001b). On the one hand, discursive psychology offers the

systematic and transparent approach to data analysis associated with discourse analysis

and holds that all data is available within the language resources of text and talk. On the other

hand, a psychoanalytic approach recognizes that there are affective and non-discursive

dimensions within the research context that offer other ways of knowing to the researcher

(Clarke & Hoggett, 2009, p. 13). Explicitly acknowledging feeling states, and including them

under the analytical lens, provides context and is an essential part of understanding how

psychoanalytic information is co-constructed (Cartwright, 2004, p. 223).

This research project drew on both methods. While following a strictly psychoanalytic

approach felt too much like swimming in my own assumptions, a strictly discursive approach

stripped the data of feelings and self-reflections that often pointed towards dynamics I could not

completely articulate, but understood to be important. Combined, however, the technical and the

affective provided a rich picture and a plurality of perspectives with which to regard the data

(Clarke & Hoggett, 2009, p. 19).

Research Design: Dialogical Relational Interview

To accomplish the proposed investigation, the research design required an in-depth

methodology that explored and observed both how "conflicts and contradictions are negotiated"

as well as the affective dimensions associated with the topic (Lertzman, 2014, p. 18). For these

reasons I used Lertzman's (2009) Dialogical Relational Interview method (DRI), which

recognizes psychoanalytic researcher subjectivity, accounts for 'the defended subject' and issues

of rationality, and addresses co-production of meanings in the interview context (Lertzman,

2015a). It is informed by Hollway and Jefferson's (2013) *Free Association Narrative Interview*

(FANI), Wengraf's (2001) *Biographical Narrative Interpretive Method* (BNIM), Cartwright's

(2004) *Psychoanalytic Research Method*, and Stopford's (2007) *relational approach*

and it is informed by other psychoanalytical researchers (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009; Walkerdine,

Lucey, & Melody, 2001). Lertzman's (2010) design of DRI follows four principles common to

narrative inquiry: (a) inviting interviewees to speak using an open-ended question that induces

narrative (specifically, BNIM's Single Question aimed at Inducing Narrative (SQUIN); (b)

allowing for the development of free association and gestalt; (c) attending to subjectivities and

counter-transference; and, (d) more uniquely, exploring with participants the interpretation of

their accounts.

Within psychoanalytic social science research, and FANI, BNIM and DRI approaches

specifically, the goal of the research interview is to impose as little structure as possible in order

to facilitate the construction of a story or narrative and access intrapsychic processes and

unconscious meaning (Cartwright, 2004; Clarke & Hoggett, 2009; Hollway & Jefferson, 2013;

Lertzman, 2014). What an interviewee reveals is in some ways a narrative of the self, or a

metaphor, rather than the factual truth.

Cartwright (2004) outlines four epistemological assumptions of the psychoanalytic

research interview that influence both the interview technique and analysis of the material: the

constructedness of meaning, the *associative nature* of interview material, the *impact of context*,

and the emergent quality of *transference-countertransference* impressions. Transference and

counter-transference are terms used, respectively, to describe the feelings evoked in the

participant by the interviewer, and the feelings in the researcher evoked by the participant. The

constructedness of meaning applies not only to the form of the narrative, but to its content. This

constructedness does not imply a thoroughgoing subjectivity, however, the metaphorical nature

of language does describe something 'other' in addition to revealing something of the

self. Associativeness refers less to the thematic qualities of the interview material, and more to

how elements of dialogue and thoughts are associated in the interview. The ways in which

participants introduce specific subjects at specific points, describe things, and express emotion in

relation to subjects, all display ways in which elements of dialogue are unconsciously associated.

For example, repetitive associations between two seemingly disparate thoughts, or how an

interviewee's tone or body language alters at the mention of specific subjects, point to possible

unconscious ways elements of dialogue may be associated (Cartwright, 2004, pp. 218-219).

Context points towards both the physical influences of location or setting, as well as the role the

interviewer plays in bringing the research interest to the foreground so that associations may be

organized. For the effects of transference and counter-transference to be taken into account, the

researcher must be reflexive researcher and demonstrate the "capacity to be suspicious of one's

own presuppositions" (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009, p. 17). Some degree of insight is needed into

the emotions, motivations and conflicts the researcher brings to bear in the interview, as well as

the discreet feeling states evoked during the interview process in either the interviewer or

interviewee.

Participant Recruitment

Six participants were recruited, which provided a large enough textual pool while also

making data collection and analysis manageable. I selected a balanced ratio of male to female

participants from each of the six impacted flood communities in Calgary. I used my personal

contacts to solicit participant referrals and followed up with an email or phone call. It was

important to me that I did not know the participants directly so that they could speak freely, and

hopefully be less likely to position their stories according to my inclinations. At the

same time, in recruiting through personal contacts, I hoped that participants would feel safe and

transfer their rapport with our mutual friend to our conversations.

My only criterion was that the participant had experienced flooding in their homes during

June 2013 in Calgary. In theory, the reality of having been impacted by the floods would help

mitigate the general tendency in the population to believe that climate change happens to

someone else (Randall, 2009), and increase the likelihood that participants would be familiar

with and invested in 'flood as climate change' discourses, or actively engaged in social and

personal conversations about the floods.

While there were some minor socio-economic variations, participants were largely

demographically similar by virtue of living close to the river, which is prime real estate in

Calgary. Similarity within the sample was not a problem per se, as this was not intended to be

representative of a particular demographic, but rather an exploration with residents who were

impacted by the floods. Lertzman (2015a) notes that divergent variables may actually function

to introduce considerations beyond the scope of the analysis, interfering with focus and the

emphasis on the issue under investigation.

Data Collection

All interviews were conducted face to face and primarily in the person's home, with two

exceptions: two participants felt that their homes were not sufficiently ready to host someone. In

one case, we conducted our interviews in my home. In the other case, we met in an indoor

garden close to the participant's work. Interviews were conducted over two sessions. The first

session lasted 90-minutes and focused on the SQUIN: *"Can you please tell me about the recent*

flood in Calgary?" The question was designed to be broad and encompassing, while

also referencing the topic under investigation. At the end of the first session, after a number of

follow-up questions were asked, I posed a more direct question to participants: *"A number of*

media articles and academics have related the recent flood to climate change, saying that floods

are likely to be more frequent and more dramatic. As someone who has experienced the flood,

what comes up for you when I say this?" This was the first time climate change was explicitly

raised during the interview and provided an opportunity for participants to respond to the

research interest directly. As well, it planted a seed that could germinate until the second and

final interview.

The second session took place two weeks later, lasted for about one and a half hours and

was dedicated to engaging in dialogue with participants. It involved feeding back what 'I heard'

and gently exploring contradictions within their accounts. Given the highly sensitive and

traumatic nature of participants' stories, I treaded very lightly in this regard. I focused on

questions that might help to make connections, tested my emerging hypothesis and further

explored defenses. I consciously used language that was safe and non-confrontational, but I also

tried to remain direct in order to keep the research focus prominent and allow them to associate

around the topic. Near the end of the second interview, I asked participants a third and final

direct question: *"Do you ever talk about climate change with friends or family"?* At the end of

the second session, I explained to participants in general terms the focus of my research project.

Based on my initial pilot interview, I found this closing conversation provided an opportunity for

dialogue around the research interest and yielded very rich data.

Following each interview I recorded field notes that included my first impressions of emerging themes as well as self-reflective notes of feeling states evoked during the interview. Primarily, these included moments of emotion associated with specific dialogue events and observations of general emotional charges for both the participant and me.

Data Analysis

Undertaking small-sample in-depth data analysis is risky. Both discursive and psychoanalytic analyses are subjective pursuits, with no singular magic answers. Meaning-making is constantly shifting, and all discourses are delineated and therefore constructed by the researcher, who will emphasize some points while ignoring others. However, the aim of this investigation was not to produce generalizable results but rather to explore participants' experiences and responses in-depth. Understanding and interpretation happen within the hermetic circle, where presuppositions, or what is already known, inform and shape further interpretation. Cartwright (2004) also notes "understanding is circular in the sense that parts are interpreted within the context of the whole and vice versa" (p. 214). In this way, data familiarity is essential.

The first stage of analysis included listening and transcribing interviews and then listening to the interviews again while rereading the transcript to verify its accuracy. The second stage involved identifying interpretive repertoires (Wetherell et al., 2001a, 2001b) participants used to make sense of the flood, climate change, and the flood as a climate-change event. I read and reread transcripts, identified repertoires and often revisited earlier transcripts and recoded sections based on new understandings and interpretations.

When it comes to analysis, there are no rules to follow when it comes to identifying interpretive repertoires. "It often involves following hunches and the development of tentative interpretive schemes, and identifying when people seem to be taking similar lines or making the same kinds of arguments, particularly images, metaphors or figures of speech (Wetherell et al., 2001a, p. 198). Within *Discourse as Data*, Wetherell et al. (2001a) define interpretive repertoires as "basically a lexicon or register of terms and metaphors drawn upon to characterize and evaluate actions and events" (p. 198). They appear as recurring patterns of word use, imagery and ideas within talk. Inconsistencies signal the boundaries of different repertoires and can serve as another form of validation of the analysis. Repertoires are said to be language resources "out there" circulating in society, providing the raw materials for social interaction or private contemplation" (Wetherell et al., 2001a, p. 204). What this implies is that different ways of talking about an event do not arise spontaneously and independently, but develop together as opposing positions in an unfolding argumentative exchange.

The final stage of analysis included considering the interpretive repertoires through a psychoanalytic lens to explore what emotional or psychological function these interpretations might have accomplished within our interview context. Rather than focusing on the participants' elicit opinion, I considered what their interpretation might accomplish on an unconscious level. This stage drew on psychoanalytically informed methods (Cramer, 2006; Hollway & Jefferson, 2013; Lertzman, 2015a) as well as techniques Billig (1999) and Cramer (2006) used to identify defensive mechanisms in action, such as pushing aside delicate topics of conversation, shifting the topic of conversation with discontinuity markers, focusing on description and using replacement narratives.

As previously discussed, the analysis was informed by secondary literature. I borrowed from the work of Norgaard (2011), who organizes her discourse analysis according to what social-psychic function her narratives perform. I also considered Edelstein's (2004) work on lifescapes in order to address the abundance of narratives focused on changed life assumptions and changed identities. More generally, I viewed the latter part of my analysis through the lens of existing psychosocial research on climate-change engagement. As I explored the ways participants made meaning of events, the voices of Lertzman (2009), Moser (2012a), Norgaard (2011), Randall (2009), and Weintrobe (2013a) provided context for how to view the dynamics occurring within the data.

Credibility and Reliability

As is the nature of researching beneath the surface, there is a real danger of falling into the trap of hasty assumptions associated with "wild analysis" (Cartwright, 2004, p. 239) as well as the ethical issue of truly representing what is important to the participant, rather than making the data fit my preconceived ideas and research questions (Cartwright, 2004; Clarke & Hoggett, 2009, pp. 19-21). The practical approach of critical discursive psychology provides a partial answer to the common critique that the psychoanalytic researcher projects too much of herself into the data gathering and analysis. Talk and text are never transparent, though interpretation always necessary (Billig, 1999b; Wetherell et al., 2001a, 2001b). Using Lertzman's DRI method also helped to guard against hasty assumptions. Feeding back to participants what I 'heard' and exploring contradictions with them, helped to bring the voice of the participant into the analysis. It also provided a second opportunity to test certain interpretations and see defensive mechanisms in action.

While some psychoanalytic researchers such as Cartwright (2004) and Wengraf (2001) recommend panel or triangulation to achieve reliability of data, Hollway and Jefferson (2013) suggest instead that research be theoretically led and evidence-based. Within this study, I met these criteria by using the secondary literature previously discussed, as well as providing evidence and data transparency in the form of participant quotes within the analysis section. I also received support and guidance from Dr. Lertzman, my supervisor, during the design and analysis phase. The following chapter offers a series of brief pen portraits to introduce and situate the participants of the study.

Chapter Four: The Participants

The following portraits are styled on the work of Hollway and Jefferson (2013) and Lertzman (2009) and aim to provide enough descriptive information to bring study participants[1] alive and to provide a general sense of the atmosphere of the interviews. I have drawn from the stories participants shared during our sessions, as well as my interview and field notes. While I have provided some biographical information, primarily the portraits focus on three themes: the setting and atmosphere of the interview, participants' flood experiences, and how they describe their engagement with climate change.

Deborah

My first interview was with Deborah, a 69-year old retiree with a Master's degree in economics. Though originally from Central America, Deborah has lived in Calgary for more than fifty years and is an active member of her church and community. I had met Deborah on one previous occasion, though we did not speak more than a few words of introduction to each other.

I conducted each of our interviews in the basement of Deborah's new home, where she moved as a result the flood. At our first meeting, Deborah asked if I had left anything in the car, referring to the thefts that had taken place during the flood. I came to recognize vulnerability as a primary theme for Deborah, which she came back to numerous times over the course of our two sessions. For example, she shared several stories that situated her as a "little old lady"

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[1] All participants have been given pseudonyms and mentions of specific communities or personal associations have been changed to protect their privacy.

(Deborah, interview one, two) and highlighted how friends, family, and God, took care

of her during the flood.

We sat side-by-side during our interviews and Deborah kept busy knitting prayer shawls.

She seemed to offer what ever came to mind and I sometimes had difficulty following her

narrative. In emotionally charged moments, Deborah would often describe the flooding river as

an "angry" (interview one) and unnatural river, and associated it with childhood experiences of

hurricanes. Deborah appeared to be uncomfortable talking about climate change. The following

excerpt provides a brief glimpse of how this tension manifested in our conversations:

> I don't talk about things like that with people here because I don't have the facts and I'm
>
> not about to read up about it so that I could talk about it because I'm not that interested in
>
> it. So that is the difference. No, I wouldn't look it up and be talking about it: climate
>
> change. Because there is no way I am going to go read up about it in order to talk about
>
> it. (Deborah, interview one)

I felt an imposition and as if I were being imprudent to want to talk about climate change.

Though she did not explicitly deny it, she clearly did not see the relevance of climate change to

her and said that she would neither seek out information about climate change, nor talk about it

with others.

Jim

My next set of interviews was with Jim, a 59-year old oil and gas professional with a

bachelor's degree in economics. We met in the evenings at his home, which is situated in one of

Calgary's most desirable neighbourhoods. Though I had never met Jim before, the interview had

been arranged through his co-worker (my husband).

Jim was openly emotional about the impacts of the flood to his neighbourhood, which had been inundated by floodwaters from both rivers. Many of Jim's stories featured his neighbours and seemed directed at illustrating the intensity and magnitude of the devastation. In his home, floodwaters and sewage filled his basement to the ceiling. Significantly, the flood happened two days after the conditional sale of his home, which then fell through and thwarted his plans to downsize and retire. I felt anxious questioning him too directly and on one occasion, when perhaps I *was* too direct, he became quite angry and defensive. It was at this point that I treaded more carefully, and the interview progressed.

Over the course of our interviews, it became apparent that Jim was quite knowledgeable about climate change, which he attributed to the media. For example:

Climate change. It is happening. Man can not pour tons and tons of pollutants into the atmosphere and think nothing is going to happen. We live in a closed system. It has to go somewhere. It goes up in the air, and it affects things. We had a weird summer. Colorado had a weird fall… (Jim, interview one)

A primary theme for Jim was not seeing the real affects of climate change in his lifetime and his belief that technology would provide a solution. Though he acknowledged a link between the flood and climate change, he indicated that he would never talk about it with others.

Lisa

Lisa is a 39-year old real estate agent with a bachelor of fine arts. Though from a working class Albertan family, she now lives in a very exclusive Calgary neighbourhood with her husband, infant, and seven year old son. We met, on both occasions, in her home. When I arrived for our first meeting, Lisa was simultaneously talking on the phone, nursing her baby,

and directing various household staff and trades people. During our first interview, she

nursed and cuddled her 10-month old daughter, which provided us a grounding point of delight

and common interest.

During our sessions, Lisa appeared to be both open and guarded, sharing well-rehearsed

stories, as well as spontaneous expressions of deep emotion. I struggled to keep track of her

stream of consciousness style and inconsistencies, but I did learn that the flood filled Lisa's

basement with six feet of sewer water and destroyed a sixty thousand dollar renovation she had

completed only a few weeks before.

Though I felt quite comfortable discussing climate change with Lisa, I sensed that she

was often changing the topic or wanted to position herself in somewhat safer conversational

terrain. The following excerpt is typical of how she treated the topic:

Lisa's acknowledgment of climate change seemed contradictory and confusing.

I think that, you know, I think that there are probably – not that I am like "there's climate

change", um, but I think there are general weather patterns. I think that there are 20 years

of getting soft and hot and wet. Maybe it is 40 years, or maybe it is 100 years – where

maybe it is the flood of 100 years. I do not think the Ice Age is coming any time soon.

But I think we are probably in, I, you know, like you, I do not, was it, they say, oh well, it

was not even the 100 flood. I do not know. (Lisa, interview one)

A recurring theme for Lisa was how to make meaning of the flood as a tragedy. For her,

wealth and affluence seemed to undermine the possibility that the flood had caused real

suffering. Wealth also seemed to be her primary insulator against the impacts of climate change.

Wendy

Wendy is a 29-year old nurse with a bachelor's of science and nursing. At the time of the flood, she had only lived in Calgary for a few months. While her condominium unit did not have direct damage, floodwaters filled the first floor of the building and its multi-level parking garage. As a result, she and her family were unable to return to their home for more than three months.

Wendy was one of two participants uncomfortable meeting me in their homes. Instead, we agreed to conduct the interviews at my house. While I had hoped a "homey" environment would provide a sense of safety and security, I sensed immediately that it was, in fact, a poor decision. Our locale seemed to establish an uneven power dynamic and I worried how much it influenced our rapport. Additionally, Wendy's husband accompanied her to the first and second interviews. When it became apparent that he intended on sitting beside us, I suggested that we reschedule. As an alternative, I offered to pick her up the following week and we conducted the second session again in my home.

Wendy positioned herself as a "hard core" environmentalist (interview two), reporting that she unquestionably believes in climate change. However, she was skeptical of its link to the flood, as illustrated in the following excerpt:

> It's hard to say whether the flood happened was like, it seems, kind of like a fluke really. In terms of that there were so many factors that went into making it such a big flood this year. So whether or not it would happen again is kind of up for questioning. I suppose. (Wendy, interview one).

Though Wendy seemed knowledgeable on many fronts, she often expressed confusion about what to think, how to react, or how she felt about something at all. I struggled to draw her out, and for my part, I felt uneasy and frustrated by the experience.

Kevin

Kevin is a 37-year old oil and gas professional with a bachelor's degree in engineering. He grew up in a small Alberta mining town and his family lived from time to time on social assistance. Via his own mobility and marriage, Kevin could now be considered quite rich, a point that surfaced repeatedly during our conversations and seemed to be a point of personal conflict. During the flood, Kevin's basement filled with more than nine-feet of water. Though his dream home was only a few days shy of completion, the flood delayed his family's move by more than seven months, and at considerable additional expense.

Kevin and I had been introduced once before, though we had never talked. As the primary caretaker of his children, we connected over questions and experiences of parenting. Kevin shared openly and candidly, and I felt at ease with him. We conducted our interviews in his home. The family's dream house (arguably a riverside mansion) became its own character in his stories. Various narrative threads circled around his house, including shifting life assumptions, family dynamics, social judgment, wealth and questions about past and future decisions. Questions of identity seemed tied to many aspects of our conversation. For example:

Could flooding be more frequent and is it due to climate change? Yeah… I do not know.

I am not – I really don't have an opinion on anti-climate change, or for or against it. I

kind of—so the idea of climate change for me is like, I'm not….I am not a passionate

person one way or the other. I think that it is almost like religion for me, I don't

think too hard about it. (Kevin, interview one)

While Kevin did not deny climate change, he seemed concerned about not being seen by

others as the 'type' of person that he associates with people who talk about climate change. He

also repeatedly described the flood as a positive character-building experience, and seemed

pleased with the opportunity to be authentically part of an historical event.

Harold

Harold is a 56-year old oil and gas professional with a certificate in mechanical

engineering. He was the last participant, and the only other person I interviewed outside of their

home. We met close to his work in an indoor garden, a relatively peaceful setting that afforded

us space and privacy.

Harold was out of town working during the first few days of the flood, an absence that

left his 18-year old son and wife to handle the initial clean up of their two properties. In addition

to the financial stress of having both his family home and investment property destroyed by the

flood, Harold and his wife formally separated in the weeks after the event. Harold also lost his

job (though voluntary) and developed stress-related health problems. Despite this, Harold

maintained that "it was all for the best" (interview one). He referred to the event as a character

building experience and remarked that he was lucky compared to others (interview one, two).

Harold spoke very emphatically about the reality of climate change, as evidenced in the

following excerpt:

I read an article the other day in the paper that the Transport Minister is saying the

Northwest Passage is not going to happen now because we don't have a navigational

system to go through there and this and that. Guys! Get your act together

because it's going to be open water before long.   It is gonna happen, probably. It can

happen and what really worries me is not my lifetime, cause I will be dead and gone

before most of this shit happens. It is my son's generation and my grandchildren's

generations. I hate to see what they are going to face. (Harold, interview one)

I was quite affected by Harold's interviews. His flood stories were relentlessly sad and

his overall manner felt defensive and aggressive. I was often uncomfortable, shifting between

fear and irritation, and at times, wanting to escape the interview.

While I had begun my data collection with a sense of "needing to find something", in the

end, I more so held a sense of curiosity and appreciation for what people had shared with me.

Perhaps more than anything, I felt empathy toward the people I interviewed and I recognized

aspects of my own engagement with climate change in all of their stories. Moreover, I came to

recognize threads of similarities between the participants. The following chapter provides an in-

depth look at the evidence, data analysis and results drawn from these participant interviews.

Chapter Five: Analysis & Results

"If someone were to definitively say, based on climate change, we are going to see a lot

more of these floods in Calgary over the next twenty years, I would kind of go "that

sucks" in the back of my head. But it wouldn't change anything." (Kevin, interview two)

The stories that emerged during our interviews were rich and intricate and at times overwhelming in their detail. To make sense of the data, I looked for recurring patterns and tried to find commonalities within participants' stories. In the present chapter, I explore five significant themes that emerged during participant interviews and transcript analysis:

- making sense of the flood as destruction and loss;

- holding split narratives of climate change: a spoken meaning that characterizes climate change as 'weather weirding', and an unspoken one that characterizes climate change as apocalyptic loss;

- an underlying pattern of unstable and inconsistent engagement;

- employing *defensive interpretive strategies* that disavowed the reality of climate change; and

- investing in narratives that positioned their identity as disengaged from climate change discourse.

Making Sense of the Flood as Destruction and Loss

"It was just so overwhelming. It was like going through your own vomit"

*(*Lisa, interview one*).*

While there was no single way participants talked about the flood, generally they seemed to make meaning of it as *destructive.* They characterized it as chaotic and tragic and associated it

with loss, death and vulnerability. The imagery of war and hell was often used to

describe both the initial hours of the flooding event as well as the aftermath in the days and

months that followed. For example, one participant's opening remark was "It was hell. It was a

summer of hell… It destroyed this neighbourhood" (Jim, interview one). Similarly, Lisa

recounted that "Our house filled with sewer and [laughs] it was chaos… I was working in other

parts of the city. It was, you know, like Pleasantville there, and down here it was Afghanistan"

(Lisa, interview one). Or, as Harold offered: "If you go east of Fourth Street it is a warzone still"

(interview one).

Participants also talked about the likelihood that a similar flood would happen within the

next three to ten years, though this was not explicitly linked to climate change. For example, Jim

said: "From now on everyone is going to be on pins and needles till something [flooding]

happens*"* (interview one). Lisa said: "I think we just have to get used to it. It's going to be a

part of our life, the flood" (interview one). Similarly, Harold claimed: "We are just looking

for… we are just waiting for it to happen again" (interview one). Generally, participants seemed

to make sense of the flood as a recurring threat by drawing on two common discourses: 'the

weather is getting weirder' and the 'government isn't doing anything.' The 'weird weather'

repertoire drew on characteristics such as the similarly severe flood in Calgary in 2005, the other

weird local weather in recent years, and the major flooding occurring in other parts of the world.

The 'government isn't doing anything' repertoire was based on the lack of government progress

on flood-mitigation measures.

As participants shared their flood narratives, it became apparent that the impact of the

flood was not limited to the destruction of their property. No one explicitly stated that the flood

had changed their outlook on life, but our interviews were riddled with narratives about

their future, society and nature. Vivid and painful anecdotes featuring loss—at times unrelated

to the flood—inevitably bubbled to the surface of each interview. No two stories were both the

same or completely different, and each participant offered unique facets of what it means to

endure natural disaster. As the psychological impacts of climate change are similar to the

impacts of both natural and technological disasters (Doherty & Clayton, 2011), Edelstein's

(2004) work in contaminated communities provides some insight into what may have been

taking place for participants. Edelstein proposes that we hold a framework of understanding that

governs our perception of a normal life, called a lifescape, which largely remains invisible until

challenged. Catastrophic events not only "change what people do but also profoundly affects

how they think about themselves, their families, and their world" (Edelstein, 2004, p. 65). The

stories generated by this study's participants, arguably people of privilege, often included themes

more typically associated with the underprivileged: loss of personal control, disability, social

distrust and stigma. Stories also displayed shifting perspective of the power of nature. For

example in the following excerpt, Jim talks about the loss of personal control and disability that

another flood will bring:

> If it floods again, the game is over. We will never be able to sell this property if it floods
>
> again. So our large investment is gone. So that is a worry too, financially. You know
>
> everyone is on pins-and-needles for June in this neighbourhood this year. So there is
>
> some anxiety in the neighbourhood, too. So that changes – that changes how people
>
> relate to each other. (Jim, interview two)

Another common association with the possibility of future flooding was social

stigma. For example, in the following excerpt Lisa speaks about being unfairly accused of

"choosing" to live in a flood zone:

I just think people just sort of made the comment that you chose to live in a flood zone.

If you chose to live somewhere else you would not flood. Whereas the entire – you look

at the overland pictures, like everything was flooded – the Stampede, downtown

buildings. You just can not say you choose to live – it is like the middle of our city.

(interview one)

In summary, participants associated the flood with images of destruction and loss, and

reported that they expect another, similarly large, flood to occur in the near future. They also

freely associated the flood with stories of profound loss and shifted assumptions about their

future, their abilities, the social structures around them, and nature itself.

Holding Split Narratives of Climate Change

I do believe climate change is happening. There are just too many instances

*of strange weather. (*Jim, interview one*)*

Climate change as 'weather weirding.' Participants did not explicitly associate the

flood with climate change until they were prompted by the second interview question.[2]

However, the anxiety over future flooding was associated with weather weirding, which I came

to view as euphuism for climate change. Lisa, Harold, Kevin and Wendy openly expressed

---

[2] Second interview question: *A number of media articles and academics have related the recent flood to climate change, saying that floods are likely to be more frequent and more dramatic. As someone who has experienced the flood, what comes up for you when I say this?*

anxiety about the possibility of future flooding. As well, Jim clearly spoke about the

relationship between the flood and climate change in the following excerpt:

>And I have talked to neighbours, and they have said we are not looking forward to June
>
>this year. It is been a weird winter. We have had a ton of snow before Christmas. Is that
>
>up in the mountains? I do not know. What is the forecast for June? What is the big
>
>month? And I know, it was a weird weather pattern that this rainfall locked up against
>
>the mountain for three days. The identical thing happened in Colorado, where the storm
>
>got stuck over the mountains and just while everything was melting. At least here it was
>
>in June melting. Is that going to be a common occurrence? There is weird weather all
>
>over the world. England is underwater. You know it is the biggest flood in decades
>
>there. So June is going to be weird here. People are going to worry. And now if it
>
>happens again this neighbourhood is gone. Who is going to stay? (Jim, interview one)

While Jim acknowledges the potential loss that future flooding and 'weird' weather climate

change might bring, moments like these were rare during interviews. Generally, the loss

participants had experienced as a result of the flood, and the possibility of future loss, seemed to

have little to do with climate change at all.

In fact, participants seemed reluctant to actually use the term climate change. Instead,

they used terms such as weird or strange weather, natural disasters, and pollution. When

prompted, they expressed their personal experiences of changing local weather, though still were

reluctant to use the term climate change. For example, in the following excerpt Deborah looks to

her personal experience of changing weather:

You notice how it's raining nowadays in Belize, when it never used to rain at
this time. Or the hurricanes are lasting longer. So, you know, everything has changed in
that way. So you notice things like that. And even here, you notice the difference in the
snow. (interview two)

Participants also drew on accounts that scientists say climate change is happening and
media reports of melting ice caps, hotter temperatures and extreme weather events happening
around the world. For example, Jim draws on a number of these characteristics in the following
excerpt:

I believe it is changing. How quickly is it changing? It is hard to judge, right? Do you
notice a one-degree of change of temperature over a 20 or 30-year period? No, not really.
But it does have a cumulative effect. You can see, you can almost navigate the
Northwest Passage, which is unheard of a generation ago, two generations ago. Is it
going to be clear sailing the next generation? Probably, if we do not change something.
(interview two)

Climate change as apocalyptic loss. Less explicitly, a second narrative of climate
change emerged. It developed in side comments, fleeting statements attributed to others, and
unclear acknowledgements. In the following excerpt Kevin refers to this second narrative of
climate change, though somewhat indirectly:

I don't want to be a crazy person talking about Armageddon. Yeah. I am reluctant to talk
about things of that nature without being an authority. I just start to, you start to, you
start to sound like just a bunch of guys talking about that The Hulk is stronger than
Superman. Everyone is just throwing out ideas. (interview two).

It is interesting to note how Kevin associates what people *without authority* say

about climate change as being crazy, the end of the world, the unknown, the make-believe and

powerlessness, and at the same time, none of these explicitly. These subtle insinuations were

present in all interviews and I came to think of this 'between the lines' narrative of climate

change in terms of Rosemary Randall's (2009) and Stoll-Kleemanna et al.'s (2001) descriptions

of climate change as apocalyptic loss. With its untethered quality, interview by interview, there

was an underlying sense that "the moment you start to interfere with things, all these things,

there's all this cause-and-effect" (Deborah, interview two) and while "man tries to find a

solution, he causes another problem" (Jim, interview two) so much so that "people aren't

realizing what we've done. There is no turning back. It's on a forward momentum" (Harold,

interview two). Though these fragments were pieced together from fleeting statements, typically

offered between other narratives, they nonetheless hold a sense of apocalyptic climate change.

See *Table* 1 for a summary of participant associations of both meanings of climate change.

Table 1.

Summary of Associations: Split Narratives of Climate Change

Weather weirding climate change	Apocalyptic climate change
Weird local weather	Armageddon
Hotter temperatures	End of the world
Extreme weather events	Unbelievable
Melting ice caps	Unknown
Pollution	Powerlessness
Natural disasters	Poverty

In summary, participants seemed to make meaning of the flood as a traumatic and

destructive event and believe that severe flooding will happen again. Both their understanding of

the likelihood of another flood, as well as their understanding of climate change, was rooted in

increased occurrences of weird weather locally and internationally. Nonetheless, most

participants did not explicitly state climate change as the reason they believed a flood would

happen again. In fact, most participants seemed reluctant to actually say climate change until

prompted. Participants held a second, less explicit and unspoken narrative of climate change,

one of 'apocalyptic loss'. They did not explicitly acknowledge this narrative of climate change,

nor did they acknowledge a relationship between the losses they had experienced during the

flood and any possible losses that climate change might bring.

The following discussion examines how participants engaged with these narratives of the

flood and climate change, and the flood as a *climate-change event*. By considering the stories

and narratives participants told around these subjects and the recurring patterns that emerged, I

suggest possible ways participants regulated information in their storytelling by maintaining

unstable and inconsistent engagement and by employing *defensive interpretive strategies* in

order to manage their engagement with disturbing emotions in relation to these topics.

Disavowing The Reality of Climate Change

I do not know. I do not – I do not think it is something that I can control. So… or, or

have the energy to try to control. I am not an activist. It doesn't bother me I guess is the answer.

(Kevin, interview one)

The movement between touching on a painful event, and then taking refuge in a less

painful narrative interpretation, emerged dynamically in our conversations. In discussing this

dynamic with my thesis supervisor, I came to conceptualize this back-and-forth movement as a

pattern within the data. Participants' engagement with climate change and climate change loss

emerged as an unstable relationship rather than a fixed accomplishment. The closer climate

change hit home, the more dynamic the movement, the more dynamically participants

used interpretive strategies to distort the topic, or to shift the conversation on to another topic

entirely. This dynamic was so pronounced that participants consecutively talked about the flood

as a personally traumatic and devastating event, acknowledged a relationship between the flood

and climate change, yet reported that they were not affected by climate change. As discussed in

Chapter Three, uncovering the changeable and dynamic nature of engagement is a hallmark of

psychoanalytic research and has been well articulated by Clarke and Hoggett (2009), Hollway

and Jefferson (2013), Lertzman (2012, 2015a) and Weintrobe (2013a). Throughout the following

sections, I provide examples that draw attention to this underlying pattern of unstable and

inconsistent engagement.

By employing defensive interpretive strategies that made flood loss *unreal*, future flood

loss *unreal*, climate change itself *unreal,* and the flood as a climate-change event *unknown* and

impersonal, overall, interviewees were engaged in disavowal, acknowledging the reality of the

situation but disowning its meaning. The notion of *defensive interpretive strategies*, though not

presented in this language, is central to Norgaard's (2011) theory of social denial. Her work

shows that in order to manage emotions around climate change, people use a stock of socially

available narratives to selectively perceive events, or selectively attend to certain kinds of

information (p. 174). In the following section, I have similarly conceptualized a defensive

interpretive strategy, though through a psychoanalytic lens that focuses on what emotional or

psychological function a narrative interpretation might be accomplishing for interviewees. The

idea of defensive interpretive strategies was greatly informed by conversations with my thesis

supervisor, Renee Lertzman, and is also based on the work of Billig (1999b), Cartwright (2004),

(Cramer, 1998) Hamilton and Kasser (2009), Hoggett (2013), Hollway and Jefferson (2013), and Weintrobe (2013a). Rather than focusing on the participants' explicit opinion, I considered what their narrative interpretation of an event might accomplish on an unconscious level.

How, why and when participants employed defensive interpretive strategies within their storytelling seemed to be influenced by both the context, namely, i.e. the fact that they were in conversation with me, as well as conscious and unconscious processes protecting them from "too much reality" (Weintrobe, 2013a, p. 6). At times, participants appeared openly conflicted and acknowledged their psychological distancing and inconsistencies. At other times, their interpretive processes appeared to operate unconsciously. It is important to note that defending against the stress, anxiety and fear associated with loss is to be expected, and is considered a healthy coping strategy. Defensive mechanisms help us to both know and discount what is known at the same time. As such, they help preserve our old realities and allow us to bear what perhaps we cannot bear otherwise (Cramer, 2006; Edelstein, 2004; Lertzman, 2008, 2014; McWilliams, 1994a; Weintrobe, 2013a).

The defensive interpretive strategies I explore in the following section consider not only what the storyteller said, but also what remained unspoken. As Billig (1999b) explains, in considering how we point away from topics in conversation and keep thoughts unspoken to ourselves and others, we can see repression manifest. Strategies have been labeled to make clear the specific defensive function they accomplish. Evidence is provided in the form of representative quotations and illustrated examples.

The Minimize and Reverse Strategies: making flood loss unreal. In

retelling their stories, participants commonly intertwined narratives of flood loss and destruction

with accounts that functioned to distort the meaning of the loss in some way. The two most

common interpretative strategies that emerged in relation to the flood minimized or reversed the

emotions associated with the topic.

The Minimize Strategy reframed or distorted the storyteller's loss by minimizing it or

exaggerating it to such a degree that its importance became *unreal*. As such, the associated pain

and anxiety of the event also seemed to be minimized (Cramer, 2006, p. 45). Lisa, like all of the

participants, struggled with the meaning of the loss she experienced during the flood in the

context of her privilege and wealth. The following excerpt is a representative example of the

Minimize Strategy, where Lisa minimizes her own loss by exaggerating and focusing on the loss

of others:

> I have staff. These are people that have nothing. They have nothing. They haven't seen
>
> their children in, like, years [crying]. So for me to lose my basement, where is the
>
> tragedy? And for, like, *Elsie,* who has not seen her daughter in like… she has missed her
>
> whole childhood working here. And, like, I lost my basement. And I got sixty thousand
>
> dollars to redo my basement. Where is the tragedy? So I just think, like, that has been
>
> the biggest thing. It is hard being in this neighbourhood because people did have losses,
>
> and they had real losses, and people lost houses in town. More people lost houses in, you
>
> know, High River. I think it is hard. I lost things and it was a tragedy and it has affected
>
> me. (Lisa, interview one)

Participants most often used The Minimize Strategy to move focus away from

their own loss and the possibility of future loss. They commonly dismissed their loss by

focusing on its relativity. This dynamic resurfaced again in relation to climate change, reflecting

the work of Randall (2009) and Norgaard (2011) that shows people manage unpleasant emotions

associated with climate change by searching for and retelling stories of others with worse

difficulties.

The Reverse Strategy emerged in instances where the affective dimension of participants'

flood experience was reversed—pain and loss were affectively turned into pleasure and gain

(Cramer, 2006, p. 45). For example, in the following excerpt, Harold maintains that the flood

was a positive life-building experience, despite the reality that he had lost his job, wife and

considerable assets:

I was fortunate. I will probably lose $100K on this. That is the economical part of it. I

will lose 120 pounds of baggage of my ex-wife, so that is the good part of it [laughs].

And you know—change, if people do not experience change they don't experience the

world. You do not experience life. Change can be anything too, right? For some people

it is just a stronger change. But if you do the same thing every day, you have become

dull. This gave me an opportunity to change, right? Gave me an opportunity to realize

there is [sic] different things I can do, different aspects to look at. And not forced to—

could have done another eleven years with my office. I could have tried to keep my

marriage going, stayed with her for another ten years or more. It was like a wake-up call:

this is it. (Harold, interview one)

The Reverse Strategy seemed to be employed by participants as a way to maintain emotional and personal control over their circumstances. It was most obvious when participants reframed the unpleasant aspects of the flood to a silver-lining. An overarching narrative that carried through all interview, and became a primary media focus, was "Helping Hands and Heroes" (*Calgary Herald*, 2013, p. 90). It focused myopically on the help flood victims received from other Calgarians, to such an extreme degree that the flood seemed to be a blessing that allowed the true magnanimity of Calgarians to spring forth.

The following section illustrates how the Minimize and Reverse strategies were often used consecutively. *Figure 1*, and the interview excerpt below it, illustrates how Kevin moved back and forth between the flood disaster and other narratives, resulting in engagement that was unstable rather than fixed. (Within the excerpt, strategies are bolded, while the flood as destructive narrative is underlined.)
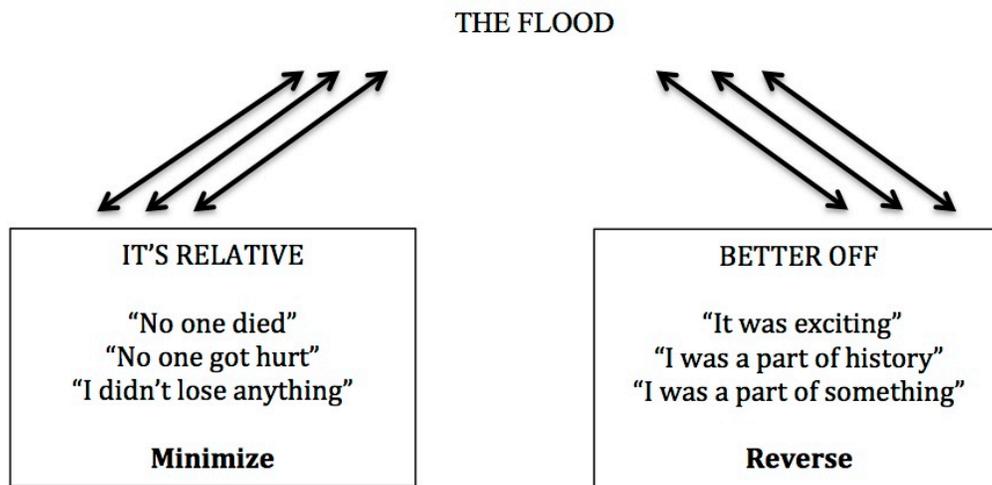

Figure 1. Kevin's employment of defensive interpretive strategies to engage with the 2013 Calgary flood.

> **But nobody died**, **essentially nobody got hurt** and there was <u>just this huge</u>
>
> <u>disaster</u>. It was kind of, I don't know, I guess exciting was kind of the word. **It was**
>
> **exciting** in that <u>absolutely morbid</u> way to be a part of, to be a Calgarian, but then also be
>
> a Bownesian or Eau Clairian and, to be <u>affected</u> by the flood. To be <u>displaced</u> by the
>
> flood. And it almost felt, like **I was a part of history**, you know. And a part of history
>
> in a way that nobody in my family got hurt. **We didn't lose any photo albums**. Nothing
>
> like that. So I guess I have to be honest, it was a sense of excitement and kind of like **I**
>
> **was a part of something.** (Kevin, interview one)

As Kevin moves between minimizing the flood, to the flood as a huge disaster, and on to its

silver-lining, we can see how he is able to both acknowledge and 'know' about the flood, but

discount this knowledge at the same time, specifically its affective dimensions. As such, while

the flood was real, the meaning of their loss becomes *unreal*.

   The Selective Perception Strategy: making future flood loss unreal. Though

participants talked about recurring flooding during our interviews, it was often selectively

perceived. The Selective Perception Strategy emerged when future flooding was viewed

exclusively through a monetary or bureaucratic lens, stripped of affect or emotion, as though it

had no connection to what they had just experienced. While actual denial requires a blatant

getting rid of, or negation of reality, disavowal can be considered as "reality with one eye open"

and a means to "distort truth in a variety of artful ways" (Weintrobe, 2013b, p. 7). So while

participants acknowledged the flood, and the likelihood of it happening again, through selective

perception, they were able to disavow possible personal consequences.

In the following quote, Kevin seems caviler about the possibility of a future flood: "For good or for bad I think, it's terrible, but when it comes down to it, if it did happen again we're not going to be on welfare and homeless" (interview one). Similarly, in the following excerpt, Lisa employs the Selective Perception Strategy by acknowledging that the flood will be a part of her life, but focusing on the advantage she has over her neighbours, and the buffer that wealth will provide in dealing with future impacts:

> It's going to be a part of our life, the flood. Just like the people who live on the river in Red Deer and Medicine Hat. They have been through a few floods. I think if people choose to, the people, you know, we're a block off [the river] and we are quite high – and especially if you look at us compared to this neighbourhood there is twelve feet difference. You are going to choose to live here. And you're going to have to think in your mind "Oh $40,000 every ten years." If that's what it is – $100,000 – if that's what it is, that is okay. We can afford it. If it is forty thousand dollars every year, or every three years, or two years in a row…that is hard. That means no RRSPs. (Lisa, interview one)

Participants also Selectively Perceived future flooding through a technological lens, drawing on stories of how governments in other places mitigate flooding, and how experts and technology could manage the threat of future flooding. These narratives are similar to what Stoll-Kleemanna et al. (2001, p. 114) identified as the "managerial fix" and what Randall (2009, p. 120) describes as the "technology will save us" dominant solution narrative. In short, future disaster is acknowledged, but we are spared loss because governments will have implemented the right technological fixes to save us. As such, future disasters will happen, but the personal consequences of future loss become *unreal*.

The Repression and Projection Strategies: making climate change unreal and the flood as a climate change event unknown and impersonal. In one moment, participants would report that they believe climate change is happening, while in the next moment, they would employ defensive interpretive strategies of repression and projection to make climate change *unreal*. While most participants did not explicitly relate the flood to climate change until prompted, the second interview question linked the two subjects together and provided an opportunity for them to engage with the topic. What often followed was a period of negotiating and positioning in relation to the topic of climate change rather than the topic of the flood as a climate-change event—so much so that at times I did not know if participants were acknowledging climate change or denying it. Upon closer examination of the interview transcripts, I came to recognize that in many cases, they were doing both.

Even after prompting, participants seemed to habitually repress the topic of the flood as a climate-change event. The Repression Strategy manifested as pushing aside the topic in our conversations and replacing it with other narratives, or acknowledging only certain aspects of a topic, while leaving other aspects unspoken. As such, the flood as a climate-change event became unspoken, repressed to the unconscious, and *unknown* (Billig, 1999b). The most common narratives were that they lacked scientific understanding, or that they had not heard about the flood being related to climate change. They also frequently stated, "I don't know," which functioned to stop thoughts and talk. They often pushed aside the subject altogether. Lisa employs a number of aspects of the Repression Strategy in the following excerpt: First, she focuses on the climate-change topic only and ignores the prompt of the flood being related to climate change. Second, she focuses only on the weather-weirding aspect of climate change and

dismisses apocalyptic climate change through an indirect association with the Ice Age.

Third, she pushes aside the topic through a series of faltering, half-finished utterances. Fourth,

she tells me (and herself) "I don't know" which disconnects us from the topic entirely, and

moves us on to a safer ground by replacing the topic with talk about technological solutions:

> A: So some media articles and people are linking the floods to climate change and say
>
> that floods will likely become more frequent and more severe. I am curious what comes
>
> up for you when you hear--
>
> L: --I think that, you know, I think that there are probably—not that I am like 'there is
>
> climate change', um, but I think there are general weather patterns. I think that there are
>
> twenty years of getting soft and hot and wet. Maybe it is 40 years or maybe it is 100
>
> years where maybe it is the flood of the 100 years. I do not think the ice age is coming
>
> any time soon. But I think we are probably in, I, you know, like you, I do not, was it,
>
> they say, oh well, it was not even a one hundred year flood. I do not know. Is it… You
>
> know, I kind of, I hope, Winnipeg has a plan. They have a spillway. Norway has a
>
> spillway. I think we are the richest province in Canada. I have been disappointed. I am
>
> not a Harper lover to begin with. But like, or whoever is our lady here. I do not know
>
> how she got elected… (Lisa, interview two)

Similar to Norgaard's (2011) study, while no one participant seemed to negate climate

change entirely, they did draw on narratives that focused attention on some meanings of climate

change and its impacts rather than others. In the following excerpt, Kevin associates first with

apocalyptic climate change—the earth is fighting back—then moves on to focus on historical

extreme weather events. He also focuses on the frequency of information sharing to explain the

'climate change epidemic' and relates it to the US shootings. He references the

"epidemic" of US violence, though fails to say that despite increased reporting of crime, actual

crime is going down. Presumably, he is implying the same is true for extreme weather and

climate change. He then stops the conversation altogether with an "I don't know," as if trying to

stop any further critical analysis of his argument:

> So do humans and their energy consumption or whatever, is that what is causing climate
>
> change? Is the earth fighting back? And is this the price we pay for these things? I don't
>
> think that there is anything that Divine about this. There has always been, the earth is
>
> always moving and burping, and there's always been volcanoes and tidal waves and
>
> things. There are more people, and there is more information moving around more
>
> quickly. Not to relate it to shootings in the US but it just seems like you hear about all
>
> this in the last ten years, that this is an epidemic. It may have been happening and there
>
> was just not as much information sharing and stuff. I do not know, I don't want to be a
>
> conspiracy theory person. (interview one)

In the following excerpt, Deborah focuses her attention on the flood as human error and

gives it predictable and mechanical origins. In doing so, what remains unspoken is the

relationship between the flood and climate change. Deborah also employs "I don't know" and "I

wasn't listening" as means to further disconnect us from the topic before moving on to a

different narrative:

> But if that dam was not open, all the problems wouldn't have happened. And so we could
>
> blame it on climate change, you can blame it on whatever. You can blame it on the fact
>
> that they built the dam in the first place. Because if the dam wasn't there… so you could

go all the way back and say things…In 1980 somebody had written a paper

about the floodplain in Alberta, and when the big one comes how high it's going to be.

And what he said, it was out by six inches. He said they knew that from 1980 they knew

it was coming, but they did not do anything about it. Because it, the cost, was too much

money. So you know, is it still climate change? I don't know. I do not blame things like

that. I was not really listening. (Deborah, interview one)

Other common narratives that supported the repression of the flood as a climate-change

event included focusing on the possibility that media information and climate science may be

wrong after all. While climate change is not negated, the lack of absolute truth helps focus our

attention on the possible unreality of climate change, and as such, the unreality of the flood as a

climate-change event.

Similar to the Repression Strategy, the Projection Strategy functions to disconnect

participants from the personal consequences of climate change by projecting climate change loss

to the future and to other people. Moser (2012b) and others have written specifically on this

tendency to compartmentalize climate change as a problem for others, noting time, social class,

geography and uncertainty as characteristics used to create psychological distance (Spence,

Poortinga, & Pidgeon, 2012). For example, in my parting conversation with Deborah, she

remarked that my work was important because of the world her grandchildren will inherit

(personal communication, February 18, 2014). Harold echoes a similar sentiment in the

following quote:

It can happen and what really worries me is not my lifetime, cause I will be dead and

gone before most of this shit happens. It's my son's generation and my grandchildren's

generations. I hate to see what they're going to face. Because what they are going to face they won't be able to see because of the smog in front of them. (interview two)

The following interview excerpt illustrates how the Repression and Projection Strategies were used consecutively. Jim employs both, moving in and out of engagement with the flood as a climate-change event. (Within the excerpt, strategies are bolded, while climate change narrative is underlined.)

It's changing. Is it enough to affect my life? In my lifetime? **I don't know**. **It's small changes.** The winters are stranger than when I was a kid. The summers are cooler. You know, it's totally different. But – am I going to be impacted dramatically over my lifetime? **I don't think so.** It flooded here. It flooded here in 1935, and [in the] 1800s. **So it has happened in the past.** Is it going to be more frequent? **I don't know. Is it just a normal weather pattern?** For Alberta, Calgary? Maybe. **But… I don't think there will be drastic changes in my lifetime.** (Jim, interview two)

We can see that while Jim does not negate the reality of climate change, climate change is *unknown* ("It's small changes" "It has happened in the past") because it is just a natural occurrence rather than a change in climate and i*mpersonal* (something that others will face in the future). Combined, both narratives function to make the meaning of the flood as a climate-change event *unreal*. All participants employed the Repression and Projection Strategy similarly within their storytelling.

Table 2.

Summary of Narratives, Strategies and functions

Narratives	Strategies	Function	Psychic accomplishment
Flood loss	Minimize Reverse	Unreal	
Future flood loss	Selective Perception	Unreal	
Climate change	Repression Selective Perception	Unreal	Disavowal
Flood as a climate-change event	Repression Projection	Unknown, Impersonal	

In summary, participants were able to talk about the flood as a personally traumatic

experience, draw a relationship between the flood and climate change, yet report that they were

not – and will likely not be – affected by climate change. For example, despite her basement

filling with nine feet of sewage, Lisa said that "I guess it's, it [climate change] hasn't, it hasn't

seemed to affect us enough that were talking about it. Yeah. Yeah, climate change…"

(interview two). Both the underlying structure of instability and constant movement and the

interpretative narratives that acknowledged but distorted topics, influenced the angle of vision

that was brought to bear on the realities of climate change. Both of these dynamics, the

movement and the interpretations, provided the processes for participants to see what was

happening, but discount what was seen at the same time. In short, the processes accomplished

climate change disavowal (see *Table* 2 for an overview).

Environmental Identities and Climate Change Resistance

She would be more of a stand-on-top-of-the-mountain Greenpeace activist or whatever. I

got a text from her out of the blue, going 'Do you frack? Do you guys frack? Do you

frack any of your wells?' And it's like, 'We frack every well.' And the next text

was 'Oh my God and you have children.' (Kevin, interview two)

To explore possible social influences on individual climate change disavowal, I looked at

recurring patterns within the data, and relationships between meaning, defenses and identity. I

held the view that how we come to make meaning, take care, and take action, are influenced both

by the stories and narratives positions available to us, as well as our need to protect vulnerable

parts of ourselves (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002; Randall, 2009). As a practical guide, I returned

repeatedly to the voices of participants who said they did not talk about climate change because

they were not that "sort*"* of person (Kevin, interview two). From there, I followed a thread that

weaved back and forth between climate change taboos and social influences that seemed to shape

participants' identities.

Taboos: social narratives of climate change. As I explored earlier in this chapter, two

versions of climate change emerged during interviews: a 'weather weirding' version that was

more freely discussed, and a second 'apocalyptic' version that seemed to be spoken about only

between the lines. Fragments of apocalyptic climate change often appeared when participants

referred to what 'others' might think, or as they developed arguments about why they do not talk

about climate change with friends and family. This dynamic reflects what Billig (n.d., 2006)

calls the *dialogic unconsciousness*, whereas speakers repress conversational topics out of

politeness and respect for what is socially permitted to be said and thought. For example,

Billig's study of talk about the British royal family showed that while informants said that they

were not racist, the general public was racist, and so the crown prince would never be able to

marry a non-white person. In doing so, Billig believed that speakers projected their

own repressed racism onto others.

Billig's concept of dialogic unconsciousness provided a method for reading between the

lines and allowed identification of a number of taboo narratives within our conversations.

Climate change generally, though apocalyptic climate change loss specifically, was one taboo

topic. Aside from the unspoken narratives of climate change loss, this interpretation was

reinforced by participant claims that people do not want to talk about such gloomy stuff: "It's not

something nice to sit around the coffee table or dining room table and have a heart-to-heart about

it" (Jim, interview two). While this may be true, it almost certainly reflected their desire to not

talk about it as well. I also had a felt sense of anxiety in approaching the topic of climate change

loss. My second interview question[3] pushed participants to make a connection between the

extreme loss they had experienced during the flood and climate change. Each time I approached

the question, I felt impolite, as though I was stepping over a boundary of privacy and

vulnerability. I was sensitive that my question could be construed as blaming or shaming. When

participants avoided making the connection, invested in the weather weirding version of climate

change, or used defensive interpretive strategies to acknowledge climate change but disavow its

meaning, I felt both relief and irritation. Within my analysis, I acknowledged these feeling states

as co-construction of meaning between the participant and me, and an indication that we were

operating in taboo and uncomfortable territory (Cartwright, 2004, p. 223). In the following

---

[3] Second interview question: *A number of media articles and academics have related the recent flood to climate change, saying that floods are likely to be more frequent and more dramatic. As someone who has experienced the flood, what comes up for you when I say this?*

excerpt, Jim demonstrates a number of these defensive approaches simultaneously: he

invests in the weather weirding version of climate change, then he disavows the meaning of the

flood by selectively perceiving it as a natural occurrence, and finally, he refers to apocalyptic

climate change in between the lines:

> Like I said, I was a believer in climate change before that. It has not changed my mind.
>
> It's reinforced in my mind that it's happening. But, at the same time, if you know the
>
> history of this flood plain, it's happened in 1935 and before that, there are records before
>
> that of 1800s, when this [Calgary] was just a little fort. I think the difference now is the
>
> amount of damage it did. Compared to 1935 when…that's the difference. There are
>
> floods all over the world, for generations. I don't know, you just—I don't think it's a topic
>
> for – you know, at work.   It isn't a topic for people. Like I said, if you live in Woodbine
>
> where my sister lives, it didn't even faze them, like that, this is something that signaled
>
> the end of the world or anything. So… I don't know… I don't think it will be a big mind-
>
> changer for anybody, if they didn't believe in it beforehand. (Jim, interview two)

A second climate change narrative that participants associated with 'other' people was

that oil and gas employees are to blame for climate change. For example, Deborah's immediate

response to the second interview questions was: "I hadn't read this one about them saying it's

because of climate change [laughs]. But of course they would blame the oil fields for anything

that's going on" (interview one). Similarly, Harold offered "…probably not in my [oil and gas]

world because we're in a business where we shit on the world" (interview two). It is not difficult

to see why the idea that oil and gas employees are to blame for climate change might be taboo in

Calgary, the seat of Canada's oil and gas economy. Amongst the group, five of the participants were directly associated with the oil and gas industry.

A third narrative ascribed to 'other' people was climate change is a joke, or an ideological belief, rather than science. This taboo narrative is particularly tricky. First, it inhibits the discussion of climate change as scientifically-demonstrated and definitive. Second, you can never know if the person you are talking to 'believes' in climate change; as such, it is always potentially taboo. Third, if the angle is slightly adjusted, what might also be taboo is our secret desire to believe that climate change *is* a joke.

Billig (1999b) holds that replacement narratives are typically used to move away from shameful or uncomfortable topics of conversation. Similarly, Norgaard's (2011) work also shows that avoiding uncomfortable emotions because they "violate norms of social interaction in the community" (p. 384) was a primary reason people did not talk about climate change in Norway. In pointing to these narratives by assigning them to other people, but not investing in them, participants treated them as taboo topics. As such, participants might not have talked about climate change loss because of social influences.

Finally, in taking up certain positions with different and sometimes competing narratives, participants constructed accounts of themselves that allowed them to not be the sort of person to talk about climate change. The following section explores the final element of investigation, climate change identity, as it unfolded in our interviews.

Identities: Climate Change (Dis)engagement. Discursive psychology views identity as unstable and relational, something constructed through the internalization of social dialogues, which are made up of narratives and discourses that position people in certain categories, and are

available for people to position themselves within (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 109).

In developing arguments of why they do not talk about climate change, participants invested in a

series of consistent narrative positions, and used them to categorize themselves and others. Two

categories of people emerged: the *climate-change advocate* and the *climate-change disengaged*.

The most common narrative positions of the disengaged included: 'I'm not an activist,' 'I'm not

an expert,' 'I'd be a hypocrite,' 'I'm a sinner,' and 'I'm too old.' For example, in the following

excerpt, Deborah offers the 'I am not an activist' and the 'I'm too old' narratives in combination:

"But what am I going to do about it? I don't see me going out there and holding up any sign, I

am past that" (Deborah interview two). Wendy, who identifies as a hardcore environmentalist,

draws on the 'I'm not an expert' narrative to explain her silence:

> But yeah, I don't really think I am educated enough about it to have, to have, to make a
>
> choice of what my stances are on it. I know that climate change is happening, but at the
>
> same time, I don't know the stats to prove it. And I don't know kind of exactly what that
>
> means. I just have a general understanding it. (Wendy, interview two)

The climate change advocate emerged as a mirror image of these narrative positions:

climate change activists, experts, scientist, young people that need to care, and environmentalists

that have divested of fossil fuels. Additional discourses tied to the advocate was that they blame

the disengaged for the problem, and advocates are presumed to be taking care of the problem on

the disengaged's behalf. For example, Kevin shares:

> I think climate change is so big and I am not an activist or Greenpeace. I do not mind to
>
> get involved in certain things, but I'm not a guy who stands at the top of the mountain and
>
> tells everybody that the world is coming to an end. If climate change is real, and is the

reason my basement flooded, it is a bad attitude, but the reality of it is I can not

fix it. And if everybody felt like that, we would all be in trouble. We need the Al Gores

of the world to drive that change, and I will follow when we get there, when we get a

plan. (interview two)

As Kevin's excerpt demonstrates, one category existed only in relation to the other

(Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). Habitually missing were narrative positions that offered the

possibility of concern and complicity, or as Randall (2009, p. 123) describes as the *climate*

concerned. For example, Jim invests in 'I'm a sinner' narrative because he still likes his car so

he cannot "get into that much anymore":

I think I am at the age where I don't get into that too much anymore. It is in there, I hear

about it, I think it's happening, but from my point of view, as an individual, I still like my

car. I recycle. I try to be environmentally friendly and I walk to work and whatnot.

(interview two)

In fact, holding both concern for climate change and using fossil fuels, was often

considered by the participants to be a point of hypocrisy, rather than merit. For example, in the

following excerpt Jim discounts the value of protesters' because of their use of fossil fuels:

There are people who protest the Keystone pipeline in the States and they show up in

their Escalade and say, "You can't drill oil here." But what are you going to do? ... And,

you know, the Canadian singer that came up, Neil Young – you live in a mansion, you

drive big cars, you fly everywhere – where are you getting your gas from? I don't know…

(interview two).

Randall's (2009) work in Carbon Conversations shows that if climate concern

is only associated with being an activist or green, people will often retreat from the identity.

Without exception, participants retreated[4] from the category of climate change advocate to

narratives of "small steps" (Randall, 2009). These narratives seemed to allow participants some

environmental concern, without the complication of being an advocate. For example, Deborah

says that while she would not do anything about climate change, or stop using oil, she does

recycle:

> With the climate change thing, I don't really see doing anything major. I do reuse recycle
>
> and re-gift – re-gift is a good one. So I do, do those little things that I could do. But hey?
>
> I'm not going to tell you that I'm not going to use oil." (interview two)

Similarly, Lisa offers that while she does not talk about climate change because she is not

a scientist, she does recycle:

> I don't know why we don't talk about climate change. I guess I don't know enough about
>
> it. I'm not a scientist. So it's sort of interesting and, you know it drives me crazy that my
>
> husband doesn't recycle. I have literally told him many times that this marriage is not
>
> going to work unless you recycle! (interview two)

In summary, I came to see that a significant influence on participants' reluctance to talk

about climate change was the discomfort of being positioned within a climate change advocate

---

[4] It is worth noting that by this time in the interview, participants clearly understood that the

topic of research was focused on the environment, and I suspect they were offering up these

small steps also as a way to respond to my interests.

category, which to them was heavily associated with engaging with the social taboos of apocalyptic loss, the blaming of oil and gas workers, and confronting others' personal beliefs. In the absence of public narratives of climate concern that allow for concern without divestment, understanding without expertise and action without activism, participants took up positions within the two competing narratives that constructed themselves as not the sort of person to talk about climate change.

Conclusion

The findings of this study are similar to those found in Norgaard's (2011) work on the social production of denial and are consistent with an extensive body of literature on emotional responses to climate change, which include defensive mechanisms of denial, repressions and disavowal. My analysis demonstrates how participants resisted engaging with certain climate change narratives. It also demonstrates how meaning, social discourse and emotion influenced participants' climate change identities to keep climate change unspoken. Overall, these findings suggest that rather than living in a culture of climate change denial, participants may instead be living in a culture of disavowal—whereby certain aspects of the reality were acknowledged, while other aspects were disavowed through a variety of artful ways. Recurring patterns within the data suggest that participants resisted engaging with the flood as a climate-change event in four primary ways:

- holding split narratives of climate change: a spoken meaning that characterizes climate change as weather weirding, and an unspoken one that characterizes climate change as apocalyptic loss;

- maintaining unstable and constant movement in their engagement—i.e.

  looking and not looking;

- employing defensive interpretive strategies that disavowed the reality of climate

  change; and

- investing in narratives that positioned their identity as disengaged from climate

  change discourse.

These dynamics provided the process for participants to see what was happening, but psychically

discount what was seen at the same time. Understanding what remains unspoken about climate

change, and the processes that give rise to the unspoken, is important for how we approach

climate change engagement in Calgary. The next chapter will discuss the implications of these

findings more broadly for the field of environmental communications.

Chapter Six: Discussion & Recommendations

"Loss is painful. We need to detach ourselves piece by piece from what is past and gone,

or from that which is no longer sustainable." (Randall, 2009, p. 128)

Introduction

As the window for climate change mitigation shrinks and the possibility of climate

change impacts shifts from looming future threats to present personal disasters, there is an urgent

call for different perspectives on why the reality of climate change is actively being resisted,

even as it floods into our homes and communities (Clayton et al., 2014; Lertzman, 2014; Moser,

2012a; Randall, 2005; Stoll-Kleemanna et al., 2001; Weintrobe, 2013a). Lertzman (2008,

2015a) has reframed the problem of our resistance to climate change action as not that we care

too little, or that we know too little, but rather we care too much. Other theorists argue that we

turn a blind eye to climate change due to a complex range of factors, including for fear of

knowing too much if we look too closely (Hamilton & Kasser, 2009; Lertzman, 2012, p. 146;

2013b, 2014; Moser, 2007; Randall, 2009; Weintrobe, 2013a). Grounding their argument in

psychoanalytic and psychosocial theory, they theorize that our resistance arises from the

unconscious motivation to protect ourselves from experiencing the anxiety and difficult emotions

associated with a painful reality (Hollway & Jefferson, 2008, p. 299; McWilliams, 1994a; Segal,

1997).

My research contributes to this conversation by exploring the processes of how citizens

engaged with the 2013 Calgary flood as a *climate-change event*. My methodology and analysis

are grounded in psychosocial and psychoanalytic theory and focus on unspoken aspects of

climate change in everyday talk. I consider both what was left unsaid as well as the relationship

between inner forces of emotion and unconscious processes and outer forces of social

discourse and social context—hallmarks of psychoanalytic theory and discursive psychology

(Billig, 1999b; Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Hoggett, 2009; Cramer, 2006; Lertzman, 2012; 2014, p.

3).

As discussed in Chapter Five, my analysis revealed a pattern suggesting that rather than

denying climate change, participants *disavowed* the meaning of climate change. My analysis

also revealed engagement that was partly unconscious, inconsistent and unstable. Reality was

often shortly engaged before being warded off by holding split narratives of climate change, or

by employing *defensive interpretative strategies* that artfully and systematically distorted climate

change information and its personal meaning (Lertzman, 2012; Norgaard, 2011; Randall, 2009;

Weintrobe, 2013a). As such, this project was both an investigation into how participants

engaged with climate change as well as an exploration of the processes of disavowal. The

following discussion explores my findings in three parts:

- Part One, *Bringing The Unsaid into View*, draws on recent research to explore the
  disavowal of climate change in Calgary;

- Part Two, *Bringing Psychosocial Perspectives into Practice*, explores the
  implications of disavowal for how we understand and practice climate change
  communications and engagement;

- Part Three, *Recommendations*, offers four practical recommendations for Calgary-
  based communicators and policy-makers to that support climate change
  engagement within the city.

Part One: Bringing The Unsaid into View

In this section, I explore the disavowal defense mechanism and highlight those aspects of climate-change disavowal that will prove most difficult for Calgary-based environmental educators and policy makers seeking to engage citizens. We can use Wintrobe's (2013a) imagery of a spiral of disavowal to address how internal and external forces collude to reinforce disavowal in Calgary, specifically how turning a blind eye to reality forecloses real constructive action. This disavowal then serves to strengthen social taboos and the status quo, which in turns supports turning a blind eye to the realities of climate change (see *Figure 2*. Spiral of Climate Change Disavowal below).
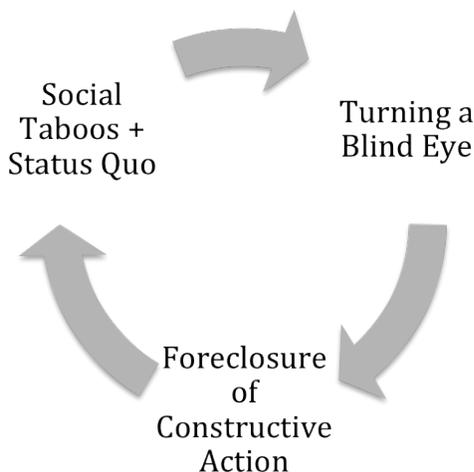

Figure 2. Spiral of Climate Change Disavowal

Turning a blind eye to reality. Disavowal is an especially adaptable defense mechanism rooted in the mental activity of splitting, wherein anxiety and recognition persist side-by-side without influencing each other (Hoggett, 2013; Lertzman, 2009; Stoll-Kleemanna et al., 2001; Weintrobe, 2013a). Disavowal strategies unconsciously and systematically *distort information* in order to *defend against* the emotions of grief and loss. Theorists tend to identify

two different but interrelated aspects of disavowal: an isolation of affect and a retreat

from reality. In other words, the parts of reality that involve loss are minimized or obliterated in

order to avoid the feelings, anxieties and vulnerabilities evoked by facing reality (Cramer, 2006;

Hoggett, 2013; Lertzman, 2009; McWilliams, 1994a; Segal, 1997; Weintrobe, 2013a).

McWilliams (1994b) describes isolation of affect as "experience [that] is not totally

obliterated from conscious experience, but its emotional meaning is cut off" (p.132). Similarly,

Segal (1997) describes disavowal as "turning a blind eye". She writes:

> Close to denial, but not identical to it, is turning a blind eye. I think the mechanism here
>
> is of a particular form of splitting…In this split we retain intellectual knowledge of the
>
> reality, but divest of its emotional meaning." (p. 119, as cited in Lertzman, 2009)

Weintrobe (2013a) explains that the aim of disavowal is to block mourning at the stage

before sadness sets in. She adds that the ultimate triumph of disavowal is the delusion that

nothing is lost because loss itself has no meaning (p. 39). For example, within this study,

participants often talked about the possibility of recurring floods through an economic lens. The

impact of another flood was distilled to a simple monetary implication, rather than the possibility

of more of the trauma they had just experienced.

The little ways we retreat from reality – so that we may bear it – are often fantastically

artful. In this second aspect of disavowal, reality is not negated entirely, but retreated from by

shifting, distorting, perverting and shoving out of conscious view just enough reality so that what

is known becomes bearable (McWilliams, 1994a; Segal, 1997; Weintrobe, 2013a). For example,

within this study, participants used interpretive defensive strategies that selectively perceived,

minimized, reversed, repressed and projected elsewhere the personal consequences of climate

change. They did this with such sophistication that I often did not know if they were

denying climate change or acknowledging it. For example, in one moment, they would report

that they believe climate change is happening, while in the next moment, they would project the

consequences of climate change to other people and places, question climate change science, and

generally pushed aside the topic of the flood with other narratives.

Disavowal does little to address the underlying causes of anxiety brought on by climate

change and it does not repair the psychic damage caused by splitting off from reality. As the

realities of climate change become increasingly too obvious to negate, the disavowal defense

requires both an ever increasing retreat from reality, but also a retreat from the awareness that we

are warding off reality (Cohen, 2013, p. 73; Segal, 1997; Weintrobe, 2013a). As such, disavowal

requires ever-increasing amounts of disavowal (Hoggett, 2013; Segal, 2003; Weintrobe, 2013a).

Weintrobe (2013a) writes:

> The more disavowal is allowed to proceed unchecked by reality, the more anxiety it
>
> breeds and the greater the danger that the anxiety will be defended against by further
>
> defensive arrogance and further disavowal. Disavowal leads to a vicious spiral, and this
>
> makes it dangerous. (p. 39)

In summary, disavowal disables reality as a means to disable feelings of anxiety, loss and

grief. By isolating climate change from sadness, mourning and loss, climate change becomes

meaningless, or at least much less meaningful. Because it never deals with underlying causes of

anxiety, disavowal requires ever increasing amounts of disavowal to ward off both reality and

our awareness that we are avoiding reality.

Disavowal forecloses constructive action. If the primary accomplishment of disavowal is that it divests climate change of its emotional meaning, a second important characteristic of disavowal is that it forecloses the possibility of real and constructive change because it disables our capacity for realistic perception, and likewise the part of us capable of insight and reparation (Cramer, 2006; Lertzman, 2009; Randall, 2005; Segal, 2003). In other words, disavowal interferes with both our thinking and our emotions, and without these, we cannot change. In her remarks about the lack of media coverage of daily bombings during the Iraq war, psychoanalyst Hanna Segal writes:

> The power of such monumental denial is not only destructive but self-destructive; it destroys our memory, our capacity for realistic perception and all that part of us capable of insight, love, compassion and reparation; and we do not learn from experience. (Segal, 2006, p. 119)

Segal calls to attention that facing reality involves a state of mind in which reason and emotion are deeply entwined. Psychoanalyst Melanie Klein contends that our love for other beings is what helps us face anxiety: "Love gives us strength to face damage we have caused to others and to our selves and leads to our wish to repair it as best we can" (as cited in Weintrobe, 2013a, p.35). Indeed, during my interviews it was thoughts of children or grandchildren that most frequently brought a participant to tears and provided the inspiration for them to touch into the anxiety and painful emotions associated with future flooding and environmental degradation. Equally, my capacity for empathy during our interviews also seemed to unlock participants' capacity to reveal their deeper emotions.

A second lens to view the same concept is the Buddhist teaching that true enlightenment, or clear seeing, comes from an integration of wisdom and compassion (Macy & Johnstone,

2012). Compassion in the Buddhist sense is marked by a move from narrow self-

interest to wider interest in the benefit of other beings. Buddhist teacher and scholar Trungpa

Rinpoche (1973) writes:

> The best and most correct way of presenting the idea of compassion is in terms of clarity,
>
> clarity which contains fundamental warmth… compassion becomes a bridge to the
>
> outside world. Trust and compassion for oneself bring inspiration to dance with life, to
>
> communicate with the energies of the world. (pp. 97-98)

Side-by-side, Klein's remark that our love helps us to face the damage we have caused is not

dissimilar to Rinpoche's remark that trust and compassion brings inspiration to dance with life.

Fundamentally, they both argue that in order to be brave and face reality, we must trust and feel

safe.

Klein and Rinpoche's remarks also suggest that to be brave, we must have confidence

that our love is meaningful, that what we do matters, and that we are connected to others.

Macy's (2012) work on 'active hope' puts forth similar arguments. She cautions that even

though we may feel that our actions don't count for much, the type of responses we make

depends on the degree to which we believe they count, and our active participation in bringing

about what we hope for (Macy & Johnstone, 2012).

It is important to note that the overall sense of 'making a difference' is one of love,

compassion and connection, rather than individual responsibility. Pushing individual

responsibilities in the face of monumental problems, such as programs that focus on private-

sphere behaviour change that ignore the role leaders have in larger systemic change, are in fact

anxiety-provoking. These programs reinforce feelings of helpless, aloneness and threats to our

survival – the very experiences disavowal works hard to defend against (Crompton &

Kasser, 2010; Shove, 2010; Weintrobe, 2013a).

In summary, disavowal forecloses constructive action because it simultaneously disables

our connection to reality, and facing reality is a key step in seeing the need to change and

wanting to change. Facing reality means facing and feeling our anxiety and emotions of loss.

The work of psychoanalysts, Buddhist practitioners and my own experience, demonstrates that

supportive environments that embody security, empathy and compassion, help us to face reality

and show us that we are connected to world beyond ourselves.

Disavowal strengthens social taboos and the status quo. Finally, a third important

characteristic of disavowal is that it involves questions of identity and social taboos that make it

as much a social practice as it is an individual practice. While we think and feel as individuals,

we are also members of particular communities with distinctive ways of viewing and being in the

world. We live within social, cultural, physical and emotional systems that make it extremely

difficult to "break rank" with the status quo (Hoggett, 2013; Shove, 2010; Weintrobe, 2013a).

Norgaard's (2011) research on the social production of denial found that social context

itself can be a significant part of what makes it difficult to respond to climate change. For

example in Calgary, the practice of targeting the oil and gas industry as bad or evil, and the

resulting stances of moral superiority and defensiveness, plays out in both the public sphere of

media and social discourse, as well as in the private sphere of personal experience. In a city

where so many citizens, friends or family members are directly associated with the industry, such

dilemmas and conflicts are often inseparable from our sense of individual and collective identity.

It also deeply influences how we make meaning of climate change and our ability to
express our concern and freely take action.

Asking people to engage with climate change and climate change mitigating behaviours
assumes that people are free to construct their environmental identity as they wish and under-
appreciates the role of identity in social action (Crompton & Kasser, 2010). Disavowal
influences our environmental identity in two important ways: first, cultures of disavowal act on
our sense of identity to evoke fear of exclusion and punishment if one "breaks rank" and forces
others to face an uncomfortable reality (Anderson, 2010; Billig, 1999b; Weintrobe, 2013a, p.
40); and two, disavowal limits the narrative positions available to us to invest in and build new
identities (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002; Norgaard, 2011; Randall, 2009). During the activity of
dialogue or conversation, people position themselves and invest in certain narratives rather than
others (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 109). How we come to make meaning, take care and take
action are influenced both by the stories and positions available to us, as well as our need to
protect vulnerable parts of ourselves (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002; Randall, 2009).

In my study, I found that for those people who work within the oil and gas industry, guilt
and shame played a pivotal role in what narrative positions participants invested in and thus how
climate change identities were formed. For example, participants actively resisted talking about
climate change with friends and family because of its association with *climate change advocates*
who engage with taboo narratives seen to blame and shame Alberta oil and gas workers. In the
absence of a middle ground that allowed for concern and complicity, action without activism, or
a *climate concerned* identity, participants adopted a *climate change disengaged* identity wherein
small-step environmental actions were discussed and adopted, but significant climate change

social action, or investment in emotionally uncomfortable climate change narratives,

was actively resisted.

Disavowal furthers certain ways of talking and knowing about climate change by keeping

other ways of knowing and talking about climate change unspoken. Jørgensen and Phillips

(2002) write: "Taboos about certain subjects lead the speaker to choose between the different

discourses available and invest in one particular discourse. Thus, in furthering certain

understandings of the world and excluding others, repression has ideological consequences" (p.

115). For example, in focusing on the weather weirding aspects of climate change, ideological

views that promote technology and human ingenuity as the solution to climate change were

furthered, while other views that promote systemic and personal transformation remained

unspoken. As such, personal responsibility for climate change also became further pushed away

to experts and governments to deal with, which in its own way promotes and maintains the status

quo. Finally, absent climate change leadership both from government as well as some

employers, also reinforces a culture of disavowal. When those with the most power and

visibility stay silent on issues, or stay silent about certain aspects of climate change, they send an

unspoken message of social taboo narratives that also reinforce a fear of breaking rank.

In summary, disavowal is reinforced through the collusion of internal and external forces.

A culture of disavowal is reinforced when certain aspects of reality are acknowledged, while

others aspects are repressed or distorted in a shared response to avoid the discomfort of breaking

rank with the status quo or forcing others to face reality and difficult emotions. In doing so,

disavowal furthers certain ideologies and powers by repressing other possible ways of

considering and talking about the world. As such, disavowal also limits our identity by limiting the narrative positions available for us to invest in.

Summary. Disavowal distorts reality as a means to disable feelings of anxiety, loss and grief. In turning a blind eye to reality however, we compromise our capacity to see and desire constructive change. The foreclosure of constructive action limits our identity and maintains the status quo, which supports a social context where there is a fear of exclusion, or a general sense that talking about climate change means violating social taboos. A culture of disavowal is not conducive to feeling safe and makes it is difficult to face reality. As such, the spiral of disavowal is reinforced.

Part Two: Bringing Psychosocial Perspectives into Practice

The processes of disavowal fundamentally call into question engagement practices that focus on raising awareness about climate change threats, and programs that position climate change mitigation as simple and easy. Instead, communication and engagement professionals can adopt *intervening practices* that better appreciate the psychosocial context of Calgary and support audiences to shift the spiral of disavowal to a spiral of engagement. These intervening practices build on existing climate-change engagement literature, for example Randall (2009), Moser (2012a) and Lertzman (2013a), and draw connections to my specific findings. They have three central aims: grow capacity for individual change by focusing on authentic engagement rather than small step campaigns; support audiences to face the realities of climate change by creating safe spaces for engagement and connection to others; and expand climate change identities in Calgary by providing new identity narratives and increasing visibility of climate change leadership (see *Figure 3*. Spiral of Climate Change Engagement below).

Expanded Identities
• New Narratives + Visible Leadership

Getting Real
• Safe Spaces + Connection to Others

Capacity for Change
• Focus on Authentic Engagement

Figure 3. Spiral of Climate Change Engagement & Intervening Practices

Developing capacity for change through authentic engagement. For communicators and engagement practitioners, the fundamental issue of disavowal lies in its foreclosure of constructive action and challenge to authentic engagement. For no matter the volume of facts delivered, nor how well-honed a message might be, if it is too much for audiences to bear, disavowal can persist. In fact, delivering evidence of climate change, with all its incumbent anxiety, guilt and threats to identity, is likely to only increase resistance to the information rather than increase engagement (Crompton & Kasser, 2009; Lertzman, 2014; Stoll-Kleemanna et al., 2001; Weintrobe, 2013a).

Lorenzoni et al. (2007) point out, "it is not enough for people to know about climate change in order to be engaged; they also need to care about it, be motivated and able to take action," (p. 446). In this way, holding intellectual knowledge of climate change, while never really engaging with it, means that our audiences may not really *know* about climate change at all. In short, knowledge and *knowing,* for the purposes of engagement, become two very different things.

This question of *knowing* holds serious implications for communicators and engagement practitioners. To build our capacity for real change, both Randall (2009) and Weintrobe (2013a) argue that people must face the whole of reality and that practitioners must support people to deal with the difficult emotions associated with coming to terms with climate change. For it is within emotional knowing that the wish for real change is born and creativity can take root (Randall, n.d.; Weintrobe, 2013a).

As such, a game-changing intervening practice is the focus on authentic climate change engagement rather than small step campaigns. In this way, practitioners move away from the

exclusive focus of awareness, understanding and action, to also supporting audiences

to face the traumatic aspects of becoming aware of climate change science. "Through this lens,

engaging people with climate change means acknowledging and addressing how people

experience the threats at multiple levels" (Lertzman, 2013a, p. 30). To do so requires a greater

integration of research and methods that help to uncover and incorporate the social,

psychological, and deeply emotional dimensions of climate change into our practices and

programs (Clarke & Hoggett, 2009; Hollway & Jefferson, 2013; Lertzman, 2015a; Moser,

2012a; Randall, 2013; Weintrobe, 2013a).

However, it is important to note that there is a critical difference (and somewhat unclear

line) between supportive programming, and programming that minimizes emotional difficulty

altogether. The first provides space and support for people to face their defenses and to come to

terms with loss. The second prevents us from facing loss at all, disengages us from facing the

emotional difficulty associated with climate change, and only functions to strengthen the

disavowal mechanism (Weintrobe, 2013a). Encouraging behaviours that tinker with and

maintain current systems, such as light bulb changes and even recycling, may not only be

ineffective, but may actually function to habitually distract participants from the larger-scale

changes that are needed (Crompton & Kasser, 2010; Shove, 2010). Billig (1999b) points to this

possibility in his theory of repression. He writes:

> What this means is that repression is not confined to the head of the solitary individual
>
> but can be collectively accomplished in shared behaviour. The rituals of religion may not
>
> be unique in this respect, but other shared practice could be sites for the accomplishment
>
> of repression. (p. 67)

Indeed, during our interviews, participants universally answered my question about their actual climate change engagement with replacement narratives about small step actions such as recycling and walking to work. While on the one hand, yes, these behaviours make small differences, they also do little to address large-scale changes or support participants to come to terms with the loss involved with real change.

In this way, for those doing the work of climate engagement and communications, it is critical that we be aware of our own propensity of turning a blind eye to our own delusions and contradictions (Segal, 1997). We must also look beneath the surface lest we continue to talk about changing light bulbs and push private-sphere behavior changes, while knowing full well that these small steps do little to address the damage, the urgency and the scale of change needed (Billig, 1999b; Mnguni, 2010; Weintrobe, 2013a). If we fail to do so, we risk providing convenient distractions that strengthen individual and collective defenses, and are unlikely to lead to significant lifestyle change or inspire people to demand more ambitious political interventions.

In summary, the disavowal defense mechanism challenges current climate-change engagement practices. Not only are they ineffective, they may actually increase resistance to information and they may distract audiences from genuine change. Authentic engagement requires the integration of practices that sensitively address the anxiety, fear and loss involved with true and realistic change. It also requires the integration of psychosocial methods to research and programming that allow for, and reveal, unconscious aspects of our individual and collective experience.

Safely getting real about it. If constructive action requires facing the whole of a reality, an equally important stream of work for practitioners is to move past the belief that the public can only handle happy news and to get real about climate change (Orr, 2007). Moser (2012a) writes extensively about the need to get real, and the need to give space to accept that 'better times' will look much different than they do today. Getting real means pulling back the curtain on the assumptions that support business as usual, as well as revealing what life will be like in a hotter world. This is not to say that all scales can fall from our eyes immediately. Moser (2012a) argues that such engagement requires navigating terrain that is "political on the surface and personal – psychological, spiritual and cultural—deep underneath" (p. 4).

To "get real" (Moser, 2012a, p. 1), literature points to the critical need to be safe and supported so that we can notice our conflicts, fears, apathy and our loyalties, and feel our pain without being overwhelmed by the anxieties they generate. The nature of this 'safe space' can vary greatly, from an active discussion group like Carbon Conversations (Randall, n.d.), to a strategic messaging campaign (Lertzman, 2015b). Randall (n.d.) notes that ideally, climate change engagement should involve a slow and gentle unwinding of the implications of our behavior and provide small steps and small anchors that allow audiences to slowly and incrementally find a place within reality and a place within a new collective identity. This typically involves two intervening practices: creating a connection to others and feelings of support, and creating a 'safe space'—be it a physical space or the atmosphere of how we communicate about the issues (Lertzman, 2014; Macy & Johnstone, 2012; Mnguni, 2010; Nicholsen, 2003; Randall, 2009; Weintrobe, 2013a).

Climate change theorists recommend that communicators constructively engage and support individuals and communities by tapping into what they love, be it place or community, and creating a sense of feasibility, collectivity and urgency arising from fact, experience, common sense and a moral sense of responsibility (Crompton & Kasser, 2009, 2010; Moser, 2008). Rather than focus on loss of money, structures and land, loss could instead be positioned as the loss of narrow self-interest and consumer society and connection to a world beyond themselves (Moser et al., 2012; Orr, 2007). Macy's (2012) 'active hope' practice for social change provides three clear steps: taking a clear view of reality; identifying what we hope for; and finally moving our situation in that direction (pp. 2-3).

In practice, Stoll-Kleemanna et al. (2001) recommend interactive story-telling and assessments in community forums to "enable people sensitively to create a more civic minded approach to their responsibilities in dealing with climate futures. In this way feelings of a new social identity and more accommodative lifestyles may begin to appear" (p. 116). Listening, dialogue and conversation are also well suited to this sort of engagement. Indeed a number of organizations have had good success with community dialogues, noting that they help provide a place for people within the climate change conversation, enable social learning, and provide relief in knowing that others care and are working towards collective solutions too (Climate Access, 2015). Rosemary Randall's (n.d.) Carbon Conversations uses motivational interviewing to allow conflicts to come to light and defense mechanisms to be negotiated. Similarly, Macy and Johnstone (2012) suggest that the power of conversations is that "by speaking our concerns, and giving voice to our feelings, we make them more visible not just to others but also to ourselves," (p. 80).

Finally, Weintrobe (2013a) argues that it is critically important that people feel supported by those responsible for leading and shaping the systems in which they live. She argues that because we depend on them to change the current situation, their lack of leadership introduces even more anxiety: "To feel so uncared for is deeply traumatic and can also lead to unbearable anxiety, born of a feeling of helplessness in the face of survival threats" (p.43), which reinforces disavowal.

In summary, disavowal disables our capacity for real change. Therefore, the task ahead for practitioners is to gently support audiences to face reality. Individual engagement practices such as dialogue, conversation and active listening are well suited to this approach, as are strategic communication campaigns that appreciate the need for safety and security to face the difficult and threatening realities of climate change.

Building new identities through new narratives and leadership. The unstable and inconsistent nature of climate change engagement provides an opportunity for change, provided new ideas and narratives are available for the taking and people are supported see themselves in a new light. Harré, Brockmeier, and Mühlhäuser (1999) suggest that the environmental crisis is in fact a discursive phenomenon, whereas change can only come about through new ideas and ways of assessing the world, made possible by taking up new ways of talking about the world. As Jørgensen and Phillips (2002, p. 1) explain, "our ways of talking do not neutrally reflect our world, identities and social relations but, rather, play an active role in creating and changing them."

A key intervening practice includes building a middle ground that expands climate change identity and allows for concern and complicity and action without activism. Current

narratives of climate change and environmentalism are heavily associated with doom

and gloom, shame and blame, and contain very few representations of what climate concerned

identities can look like (Anderson, 2010). While telling new narratives may seem an obvious

task of climate change communicators, within the context of this research it takes on a slightly

different function: rather than developing messaging on climate change science, the focus should

be on developing narratives that address climate change taboos, reveal unspoken narratives, as

well as provide new and broader spectrums of climate change identity.

In speaking of gender and masculinity, Wetherell et al. (2001a) write: "Transforming the

status quo becomes a matter of challenging and changing discourses, encouraging people to tell

different stories about themselves and others" (p. 193). This arguably applies to climate as well.

In this context, I propose that we need stories that illustrate and acknowledge the multiple

identities of oil and gas workers and provide new narratives for identity investment outside of

'activist,' 'expert,' 'hypocrite' and 'sinner'. For example, a mother or father can be concerned

about the future of their children, but also work within the oil and gas sector as a means to

support their family. We need new discourses that acknowledge and illustrate the unspoken

dimensions of climate change loss. We also need stories that challenge business as usual, and we

need to tell different stories about a life beyond carbon dependency that has a place for people

like us. The practices previously addressed, such as community dialogue and interactive

storytelling, help to both build and circulate new identity narratives, as do more traditional

methods of storytelling.

A second intervening practice to expand identities involves supporting people to see

themselves within a new light, which goes hand in hand with generally providing supportive and

compassionate safe places. However, Weintrobe (2013a) and others argue that people

also need visible, real and un-idealized leaders who do not pretend to have it figured out to

model how to face reality as well as being able to demonstrate the capacity for authentic change

(Macy & Johnstone, 2012; Rinpoche, 1973). This is not to be confused with sheltering citizens

from facing any loss at all, which unwittingly reinforces the spiral of disavowal.

   In summary, a culture of disavowal is not conducive to feeling safe and makes it difficult

to face reality. Practitioners must provide new narratives for identity investment that allow for

concern and complicity, action without activism, and diversify climate change identities.

Audiences also need visible leaders who can both address the anxiety evoked by an absence of

leadership and model change.

   Summary. Getting real about climate change helps us to see the need for change and

facilitates our capacity to make real change. In turn, change helps us to break silences and bring

forth new and different narratives that expand climate change identities and collectively work to

shift the climate change social taboo in Calgary. This in turn may foster more support to face

reality, and reinforces a spiral of engagement.

   The task ahead for climate change communication and engagement practitioners is to

incorporate intervening practices into their work that gently support audiences to face reality and

the associated feelings of anxiety and loss. Engagement practices such as dialogue, conversation

and active listening provide safety and security, and allow for new ways of seeing and talking

about the world. Critically, disavowal means that we must better integrate psychosocial and

psychoanalytic methods into our engagement and communications practices and programs.

Part Three: Recommendations for Calgary Climate Change Communicators

It is widely recognized that communicating climate change science is complicated both by the technical nature of the information as well as by the highly charged emotional and ideological dimensions of the topic (Lertzman, 2014). This is perhaps even more so in Calgary, the seat of Canada's oil and gas economy. The following section offers four practical recommendations for Calgary-based climate change communicators and policy makers based on the findings of this study and other recent research. These include:

- Recommendation One: Integrate Psychosocial Research Practices to Better Reveal and Address Calgary's Social Context.

- Recommendation Two: Make Climate Change Leadership More Visible.

- Recommendation Three: Build Stories That Show Calgarians in a Different Light.

- Recommendation Four: Support Climate Change Conversation Through Integration.

Recommendation One: Integrate psychosocial practices to better reveal and address Calgary's social context. Calgary-based communications and engagement practitioners must better understand and incorporate psychosocial research methods into climate change programming. Relying on research methods that take at face value what people say and report, such as surveys and polling, fails to uncover the social, psychological and deeply emotional dimensions of climate change for Calgarians (Lertzman, 2014). Rather than ignoring this, we must ask questions about how Calgarians feel about climate change. How do they experience talking about climate change with others? How do business and government leaders feel about

their responsibilities? In answering these questions, we will be more equipped to

meaningfully support Calgarians to engage with the realities of climate change.

       Recommendation Two: Make climate change leadership more visible. Research

consistently shows that people look to, and will be looking to, government to manage the

problems of climate change (Moser, 2012, p.7). Climate change communication strategies aimed

at individuals are limited because individuals on their own cannot solve climate change and they

know it (Norgaard, 2011; Weintrobe, 2013a). In the absence of collaboration between leaders

and their people, or visible leadership at all, discussions of climate change can turn to (and get

stuck in) individual feelings of powerlessness: "I am only an infinitesimal being in the order of

things" (Stoll-Kleemanna et al., 2001, p. 112). These feelings do little more than increase

anxiety and reinforce defenses that work against genuine engagement. Alternatively, discussions

may turn to (and get stuck in) the role of government sustaining unsustainable systems and ways

of life, and the power they have to make real social change (Moser, 2012b, p. 11; Shove, 2010).

       Local governments in Alberta are working to address climate change mitigation and

adaptation, though these actions are often not discussed for fear of public response and breaking

social taboos. Rather than say nothing, leaders must improve the visibility of their climate

change leadership; for example the progressive planning and policy work happening within

municipal operations and larger city systems. In doing so, their leadership will help address

feelings of helplessness and make climate change engagement work easier for everyone

involved. The second appropriate role for government is to be physically visible and present

within the community and to take an active role in listening, acknowledging concerns and

anxieties, and emphasizing government's role in collective climate change action.

Recommendation Three: Build stories that show Calgarians in a different

light. Most importantly, we must move beyond the sport of 'us and them' narratives that plays

out in our media and living rooms alike. The truth is, in Western culture, we all share some

responsibility for environmental degradation and live within systems that are beyond our control

(Moser, 2008; Shove, 2010). Oil and gas workers, and their friends and families, need new ways

of seeing themselves that do not position them as solely responsible for the problem. Otherwise,

we are silencing an entire group of powerful people, precisely those best positioned to make real

and genuine systemic change. There is already a lot of good work on the role of storytelling and

narrative in motivating environmental activism; for example, Ganz (2012) writes extensively on

the Story of Self and how to use narrative, and specifically protagonists, that mobilize emotions

and engage citizens (Moyer, 2013; Pike, Doppelt, & Herr, 2010). As well, Randall (2009, p.

126) advises "Using a diverse range of role-models, that truly reflects the experiences of the

audiences." We desperately need all Calgarians, specifically oil and gas workers, to see

themselves in the possibility of change, not just 'climate change advocates'.

Recommendation Four: Support climate change conversation through integration.

Relying on information-based approaches, as well as individual behavior-change programs, is

particularly ill suited for a Calgarian audience that lives within a complicated and defensive

social context. Programming must allow information to be gently and sensitively assimilated.

Programming must appreciate and address the conflicted and deeply emotional nature of climate

change for Calgarians. So too must it address and acknowledge multiple identities, for example

that a mother or father can be concerned about the future of their children, but also work within

the oil and gas sector as a means to support their family. Finally, programming must

acknowledge the systemic barriers of living within a carbon-based society, so as to

address and reduce the anxiety and feelings of helplessness that arise when these are ignored.

As previously discussed, conversation, dialogue, motivational interviewing and active

listening formats address these multiple programming needs simultaneously. They are more a

means than an end themselves. In actively discussing and telling stories, Calgarians can allow

conflicts to become known and negotiate their individual and collective defense mechanisms.

These formats can also foster social learning and may help evolve new narratives and new

identities that help people to see themselves in a new light. Conversation and dialogue also work

to address the individual feelings of powerlessness by connecting individuals to a larger

community of people. Some of this work is already underway with organizations like Alberta

Climate Change Dialogues (see www.albertaclimatedialogue.ca).

Lertzman (2013a, 2014) provides an invaluable framework for practitioners to deliver

holistic programming that appreciates these cultural, emotional and systemic components, while

still fulfilling the need to deliver actionable results. She considers programming based on the

four predominant approaches to engagement research and practice: behavioural, socio-cultural,

systems and psychosocial, referred to as the "Quadrant for Engagement" (Lertzman, 2013a, p. 7).

She argues that ideally we must increase levels of integration across all four Quadrants, and be

cognizant when we operate in one Quadrant to the exclusion of others. Rather than using only

one piece of what is possible, we must instead draw from all Quadrants when designing and

building programs.

Implications for Future Research

In considering the implications of this study for areas of possible future research, I must join an existing chorus of theorists who call for more investigation into how psychosocial and psychoanalytical research can be translated into the field of climate change communications. More practical examples, pilots and case studies are desperately needed to showcase and refine these approaches (Lertzman, 2013a; Randall, n.d.).

Based on my experience and the studies undertaken to complete this thesis, I believe that Lertzman's (2013a) Quadrant approach to engagement provides an excellent and practical framework for education and communications practitioners and is well suited to an interdisciplinary pilot study.

During the course of writing my discussion, I also became aware of *terror management theory* (see Dickinson (2009)). It holds that our fear of death is the primary source of human anxiety. To manage our anxiety, it holds that we revert to our culture's fundamental worldviews. It is potentially an interesting and powerful way to understand the dynamics happening within this study's data. Additionally, I believe the field of discursive psychology holds a lot of potential for environmental education and communications. While it has traditionally been applied to topics of gender and politics, it is well suited to any field with questions of meaning making, identity and power. Specifically, it would be very interesting to consider discourses of climate change in Calgary more thoroughly and investigate more in-depth how they are adopted and their role in identity formation and promoting certain ideologies. Along these lines, I believe it would be very interesting to investigate how leaders within government, business and

community organizations engaged with the flood as a climate-change event, and

explore how their engagement might influence and reinforce the social context within Calgary.

It would also be interesting to revisit the participants in a year or five years from now, to

compare how their engagement with climate change may have shifted, and to investigate how

much the trauma of the experiencing the flood influenced their resistance to climate change.

Conclusion

The unspoken realm of engagement that operates beneath the surface, out of sight, and

often out of discursive mind, holds a very different set of implications for communicators and

engagement practitioners than dominant approaches to engagement, which tend to conceptualize

humans as rational, conscious agents, free to express and behave as they wish. At the heart of

these implications are psychoanalytic notions that "people do not know themselves well, hide

uncomfortable truths from themselves and are frequently mistaken in their estimations of

themselves and of others" (Randall, 2013, p. 87). Communicators must beware that in

addressing climate change in Calgary, they will be laying bare a series of narratives that are

riddled with anxiety, shame, guilt and fear. Paradoxically, in skirting the issue, communicators

will be strengthening the dynamic of disavowal, namely a further retreat from reality.

Rather than build programming as though climate change were not experienced as a

taboo narrative, or shy away from the topic for fear of citizen response, communicators and

policy makers must better understand and appreciate the psychological and social dimensions of

climate change and incorporate this knowledge into their communications campaigns and

engagement strategies. Our typical communications and engagement approaches of delivering

ever-increasing amounts of information to individuals without properly supporting

people to work through their contradictions may do little more than reinforce a spiral of

disavowal.

Based on the findings of this study as well as recent research, I recommend that Calgary-

based climate change communicators and engagement practitioners integrate intervening

practices into their programming that grow capacity for individual change, support audiences to

face the realities of climate change, and expand climate change identities. Specifically,

practitioners must address Calgary's unique social context and make climate change leadership

more visible; build new stories that allow Calgarians to see themselves in a different light; and

support climate change conversation through an integrated approach to programming.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

"It's hard to have vision when we're afraid to look up" (S. M. Rinpoche, 2014, para. 9).

In embarking on this project I had hoped, or perhaps expected, that the flooding event in Calgary would precipitate a larger social discussion about climate change. The previously unknown and unreal consequences of climate change would have finally 'hit home', and with such personal impact, that surely people—if not their government—would begin talking about the reality upon us. But it was not so. Without exception, the people I interviewed reported that they never talk about climate change with other people, and rarely thought about it themselves.

My research revealed a depth of engagement operating 'beneath the surface' that was influenced both by the stories and positions available to participants, as well as their seeming need to protect vulnerable parts of themselves. The results of this study suggest that while participants did acknowledge a connection between the flood and climate change, they talked about it as though it held very little personal meaning for them. In the end, they were able to both know and not know about climate change, which is a peculiar problem for researchers and communicators.

In returning full-circle to the surveys published following the 2013 Calgary flood, it is not difficult to see that designing our engagement programs on research that takes at face value what people report in surveys is problematic. As such, this project is as much about disavowal and climate change as it is a demonstration of what psychosocial and psychoanalytic approaches can allow, enable and reveal. If environmental communicators, educators and policy developers are to move beyond "business as usual" (Government of Alberta, 2013, p. 2) and support more meaningful discussion about the realities of climate change—or discussion of it at all—we must

develop a deeper understanding of the complex and underlying structures of how

people make meaning, how they feel about climate change, and what may be working to activate

silence around certain aspects of climate change. As (Weintrobe, 2013b) cautions:

"*Understanding human responses to climate change is just as important as—if not more*

important than—understanding climate change itself" (p. 1 [emphasis added]).

Throughout this project, I have drawn on a wealth of literature that offers psychoanalytic

and interdisciplinary perspectives on engaging with climate change. I have worked hard to

represent the integrity of these theorists while drawing a relationship between my findings and

their work. In the end, I believe the notion that people need 'safe spaces' to face reality

(Lertzman, 2013a; Randall, 2005, n.d.) is an important and useful path forward. I also believe

that the spiral of engagement and intervening practices I discussed in Chapter Six are equally

well suited to address disavowal within organizations, which is often a critical first step in

moving from traditional behavior-based programs to more authentic and successful climate

change engagement.

Finally, as environmental degradation and climate change impacts increase, our job as

environmental communicators will also become increasingly important and fuelled by

desperation. Organizations will look to us for expertise on engagement, and we must rise

responsibly to the challenge. I encourage practitioners to consider their leadership role seriously,

though gently. It is important that we too seek out supportive and compassionate spaces that

allow us to engage in our own reflective practices. We too must consider how much of our

defensive practices may be nested within the programs we design – be they our own or belonging

to our organizations. Perspectives and practical methods that better acknowledge the whole

human are surely needed, as well as practitioners who support and enable this view.

While it takes courage to look beneath the surface at what is often unspoken, we must have

confidence that what is there is meaningful, and that giving it a voice will make a difference.

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