



CANOPY OF THOUGHTS

MFA RESEARCH SUMMARY

ELYSSA SYKES-SMITH



INTRODUCTION

Title: *Canopy of Thoughts*.

A pilot study using A Canopy of Thoughts (ACT) artwork and a Mind Walk framework to understand the psychological effects of the global climate crisis. This project including the pilot study and resulting film, was developed for Elyssa Sykes-Smiths MFA Thesis project, Spatial Performance and Design (AAIS), at the Architectural Association School of Architecture (2021).

Keywords: Arts-based-health-research. Qualitative Research. Concept Mapping. Dissociation. Climate Psychology.

Canopy of Thoughts by Elyssa Sykes-Smith approaches the topic of environmental sustainability as a human rights issue and aims to highlight the impact of the global climate crisis on mental health.

Constructed as an arts-based-health research project, it is grounded in scientific, theoretical and artistic research, and working from the following problem question:

“How to define and measure experiences of dissociation through the metaphorical relationship of protagonist and narrative utilising concept mapping techniques and sensory aspects to understand the role of embodiment in climate psychology?”. A select group of participants impacted by the Australian bush fire season of 2019-2020 were invited to participate in the study.

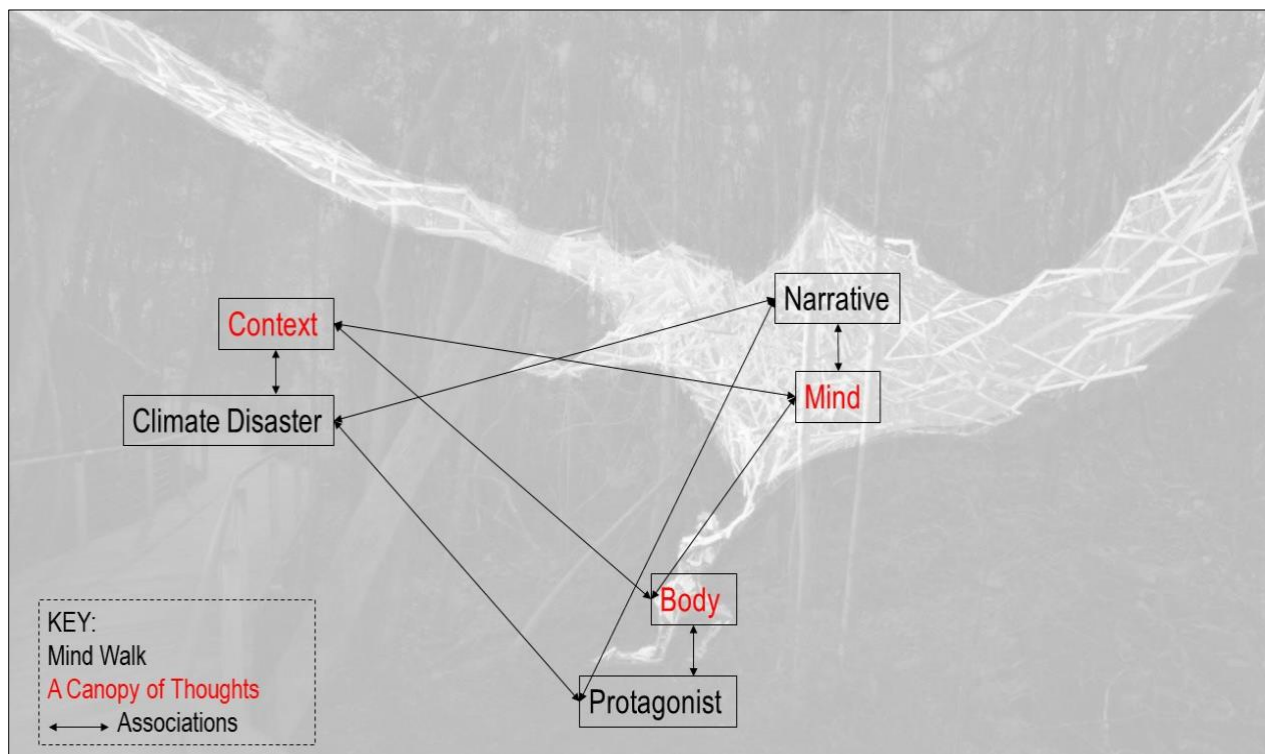
The artistic metaphor acts to bridge and bind the research stages and performance, *representing individual experiences within a global narrative.*



METHOD

MIND WALK RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

Mind Walk is a research, education and social engagement framework. The Mind Walk framework in this study will be implemented through concept mapping and interview. The ACT artwork metaphor provides the foundation for personal storytelling of the protagonist (i.e. you, the participant) and their narrative (i.e. your story). The process will require the participant to access their memory and engage with their imagination. The following concept map visually demonstrates the concepts involved in the ACT artwork and the Mind Walk framework, and the relationships between these concepts, within this study.



ACT artwork and Mind Walk framework concept map; Sykes-Smith (2021)

PARTICIPANTS

Participation in this study consists of the following research activities:

- i. Participant consent form
- ii. Biographical information survey
- iii. Climate disaster history survey
- iv. Concept mapping activity
- v. Follow-up interview

Participants for the study are selected based on having experienced a climate-based disaster and on the basis of location, in this case the region of the South Coast in New South Wales in Australia.

Consent: Participants are required to sign the informed consent document prior to commencing the concept mapping and follow-up interview.

SURVEYS

Biographical Information Survey and Climate Disaster History Survey: Participants are required to complete the biographical information survey prior to commencing the concept mapping and follow-up interview.

CONCEPT MAPPING

Participants were required to complete one concept map for the purpose of this study.

Platform: Virtual (Zoom; Skype)

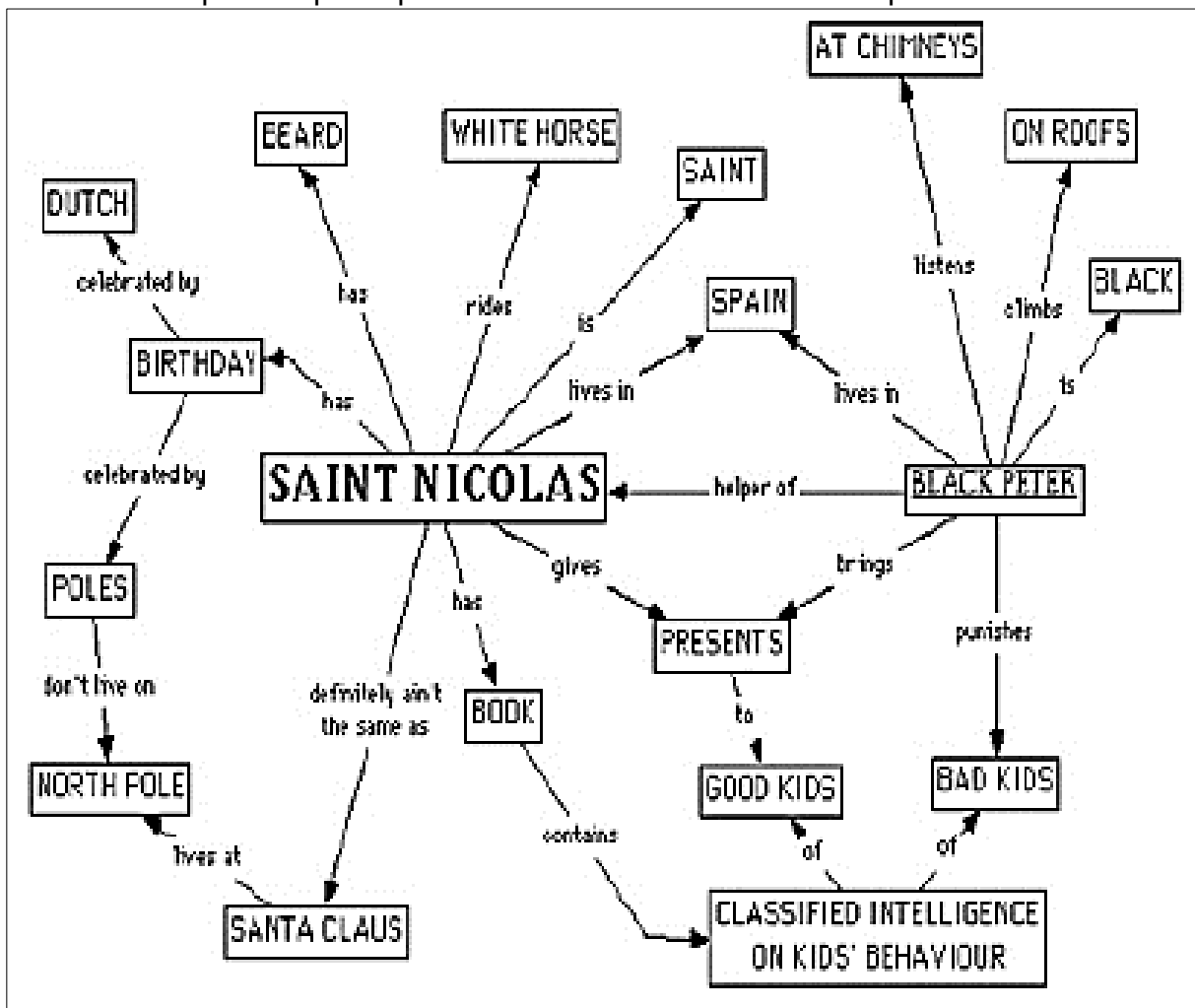
Duration: 60min virtually facilitated workshop including a 30min timeframe per concept map

Dynamic: Individual activity accompanied by a one-to-one facilitated workshop

Disciplines: Downloadable attachments to edit digitally or physically

Participant requirement: Laptop and internet (optional: camera, printer, paper, pen/pencil).

Concept maps can demonstrate how people visualise relationships between various concepts. The example in figure 4 was selected because it demonstrates a variety of ways in which the figure, St. Nicolas (as a protagonist) might be understood. It includes different names, physical features, activities, and additional characteristics. It also includes connectors to provide participants with an illustration of how maps could be constructed.



Example, exemplar concept map of St. Nicolas; Lanzing (1996).

Concept Mapping Instructions: The concept map template used for this study is provided as an attachment in the following formats: Word, PDF, JPEG. The concept map template can be downloaded from the email and can be:

Annotated digitally using any software program and saved as a copy.

Printed, annotated by hand, and photographed.

Or re-drawn on paper, annotated by hand, and photographed.

Please select your option and prepare the necessary materials and/or files prior to the facilitated concept mapping activity workshop. The workshop will be scheduled via email.

Guidance:

- i. Please identify a personal memory that is related to the climate crisis i.e., a climate-based disaster that you have been affected by directly or indirectly.
- ii. Tell your story using the concept map template provided.
- iii. Concept maps should reflect key experiences and perceptions related to your experience of a climate-based disaster.
- iv. You are encouraged to include both contextual factors, thoughts and emotions, in the creation of your concept maps.
- v. Concept maps should attempt to accurately reflect your individual experience, thoughts and feelings.
- vi. Please limit your concept map to the one-page concept map template provided.
- vii. Concept maps must be returned to: sykes-smith@aaschool.ac.uk

FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW

Platform: Virtual (Zoom; Skype)

Duration: 60minutes

Dynamic: One-to-one; semi-structured interview

Disciplines: Video call; dialogue, interview

Documentation: Laptop (screen recording), H4n Audio recorder

Participant requirement: Laptop/tablet (prior to Interview: ensure your device battery is fully charged); Zoom or Skype installed on your device.

Select participants will invited to participate in a follow-up interview.

Interview Questions: Following the completion and return of the participant concept maps, themes will be identified based on the completed concept maps. Based on these themes, follow-up video call interviews will be designed. These interviews will focus on content mining, or asking participants questions "...designed to explore the detail which lies within each dimension, to access meaning it holds for the interviewee, and to generate an in-depth understanding from the interviewee's point of view" Legard (2003).

Premise for inviting participants for a follow-up interview: Review completed concept maps and look for evidence of a "network structure" or "nascent net structure" as "highly integrated networks provide evidence of a deep understanding that could be applied to new situations." (Kinchin et al., 2010).

Interview structure: Selected participants will be invited to participate in a follow-up structured research interview, which will include the following main steps (Kinchin et al. 2010):

- i. *ask the question* (at “slow normal” speed and in a neutral tone but with emphasis on certain words to help the respondent understand the question),
- ii. *listen to the reply*,
- iii. ensure that the respondent *answers in full* by using nondirective probes or prompts,
- iv. record the answers, and
- v. *feed back complex replies* (to make sure that the interviewer has understood them and to prompt further comment).

The follow-up structured research interviews are aimed to explore areas identified in the map and to uncover the perceived connections (Wheeldon 2009) between the contextual factors and the psychological impacts of the participants experience of a climate disaster. The questions were constructed in response to the concept maps returned by the participants, designed to “open up the research territory and to identify the dimensions or issues that are relevant to the participant” (Legard et al., 2003, p. 148).

An approximate number of 10 deliberately open-ended questions (Wheeldon 2009) will be presented to the participants through a videocall interview along with re-presenting their previously completed concept map to reference during the interview. Two sets of interview questions will be designed based upon concept maps returned in the categories presenting “network structures” and “nascent net structures” (Kinchin et al. 2010).

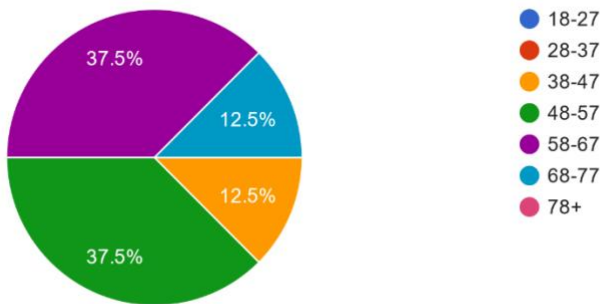
PILOT RESEARCH STUDY FINDINGS

- 1. SURVEYS
- 2. CONCEPT MAPPING
- 3. FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEWS
- 4. FILMS

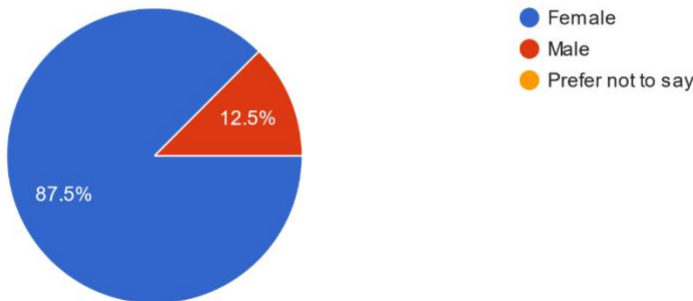
1. SURVEYS

Survey 1. Biographical Information Results.

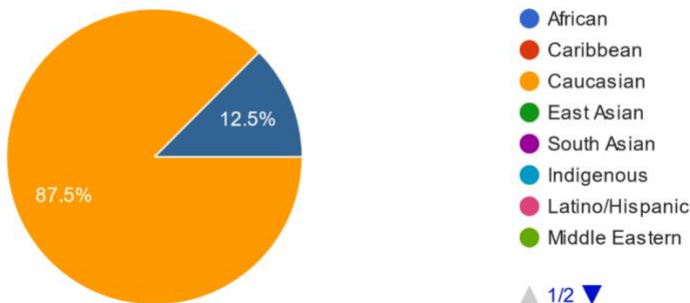
1) Age:
8 responses



2) Gender:
8 responses

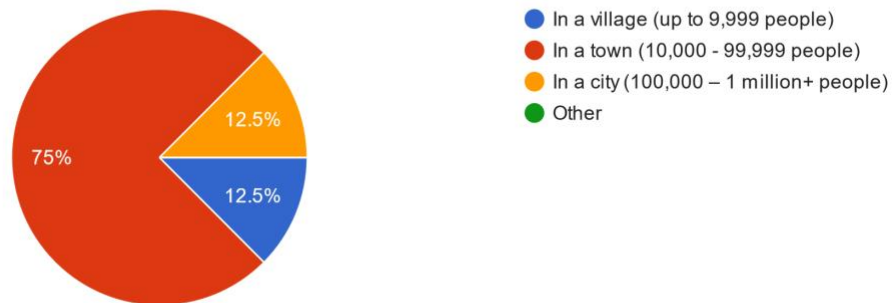


3) Ethnicity:
8 responses



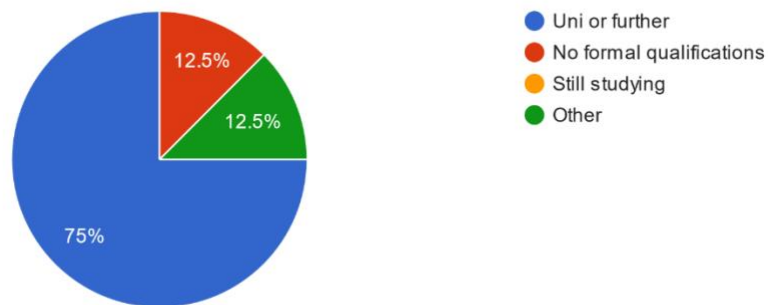
4) Where do you currently reside?

8 responses



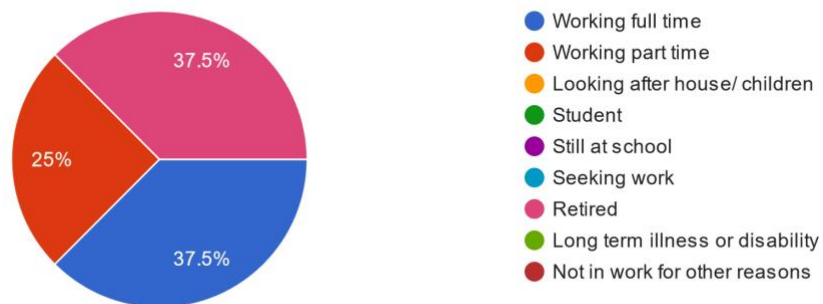
5) What is the highest level of education you have achieved?

8 responses



6) What is your current working status?

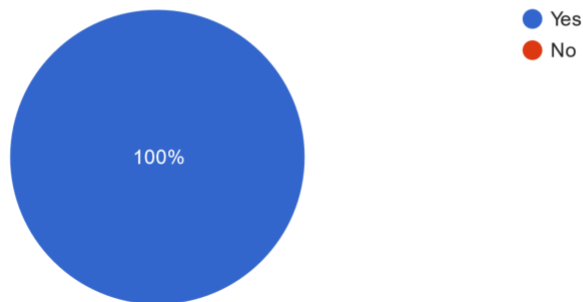
8 responses



1.1.2 Survey 2. (Part 1) Climate Disaster History Results.

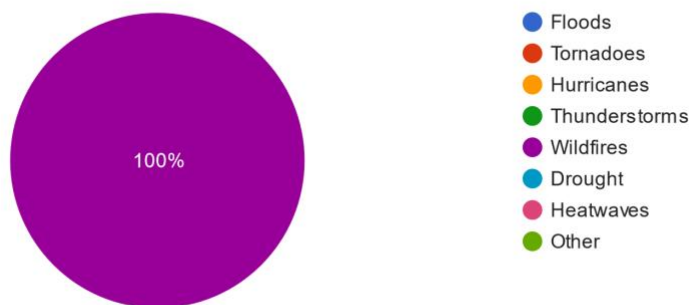
1) Have you personally experienced a climate disaster? (If you select “No” do not answer questions 2 – 8, continue to part 2)

8 responses



2) Please select the type of climate disaster(s)* you have experienced (refer to glossary):

8 responses



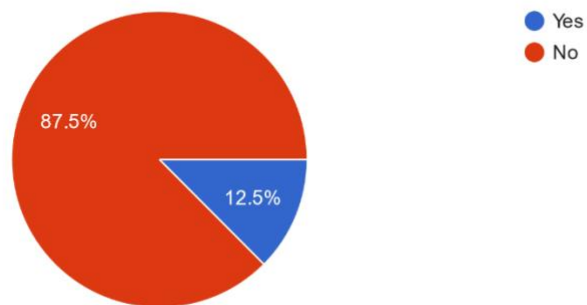
3) When did the climate disaster you have experienced occur? (Please write the date in the space provided)

8 responses

2020
4/1/20
December 2019 - January 2020
2019/2020 summer
End of 2019 to early 2020
21/12/2019
January 2020
2019/2020

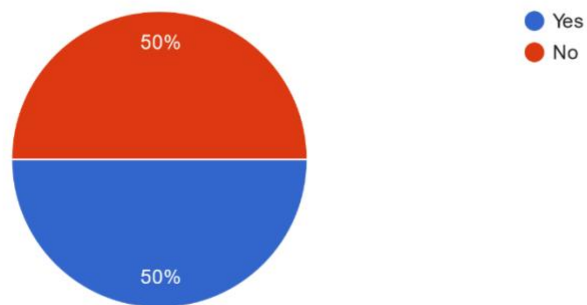
4) Has your experience of a climate disaster resulted in personal injury?

8 responses



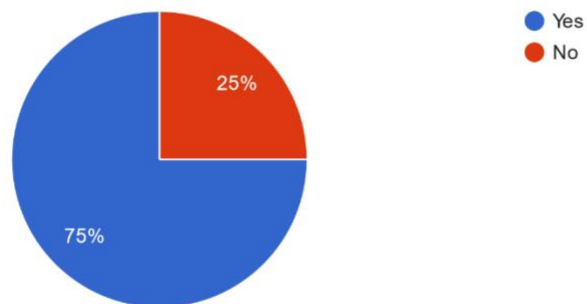
5) Has your experience of a climate disaster resulted in damage to property?

8 responses



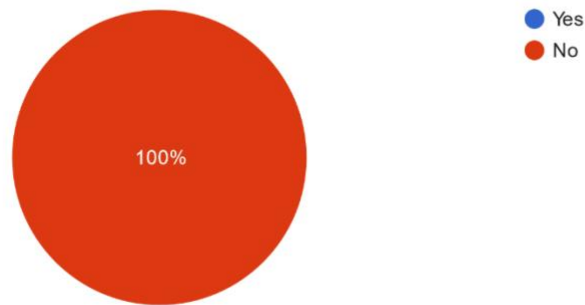
6) Has your experience of a climate disaster resulted in evacuation?

8 responses



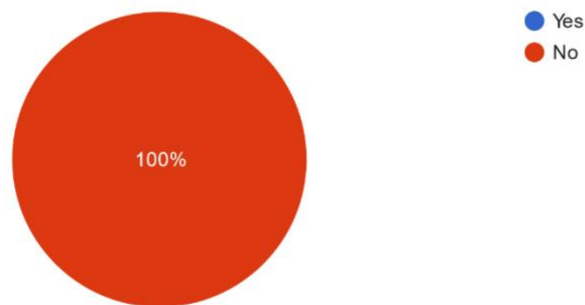
7) Has your experience of a climate disaster resulted in national migration?

8 responses



8) Has your experience of a climate disaster resulted in international migration?

8 responses

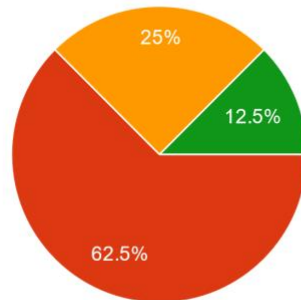


1.1.3 Survey 2 (Part 2). Climate Disaster History Results.

1) Thinking about your local area, how likely is it, if at all, that each of the following will be harmed by climate disaster in the next five years? If you're not sure, just give your best estimate.

A. Your health

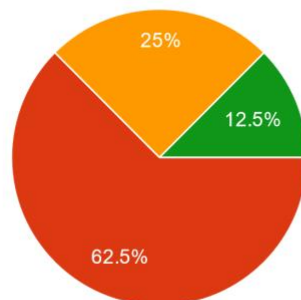
8 responses



- Definitely will not be harmed
- About a 25% chance of harm
- About a 50-50 chance of harm
- About a 75% chance of harm
- Definitely will be harmed
- Will not be harmed because a climate disaster will not occur

B. The health of others in your family

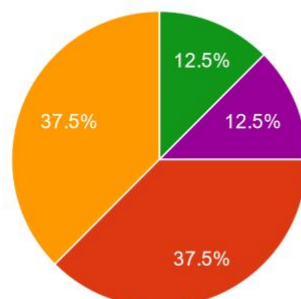
8 responses



- Definitely will not be harmed
- About a 25% chance of harm
- About a 50-50 chance of harm
- About a 75% chance of harm
- Definitely will be harmed
- Will not be harmed because a climate disaster will not occur

C. The health of others in your community

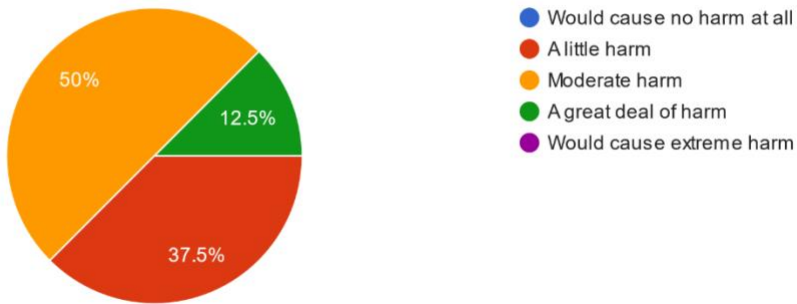
8 responses



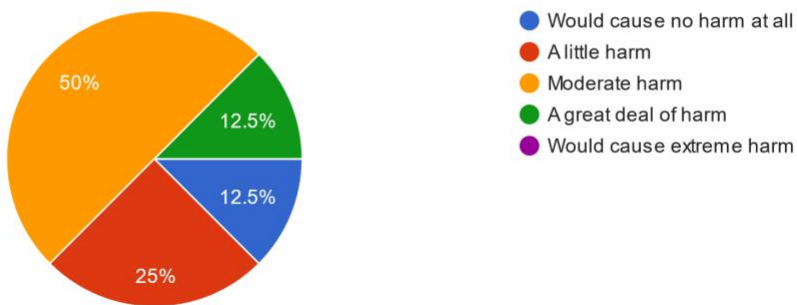
- Definitely will not be harmed
- About a 25% chance of harm
- About a 50-50 chance of harm
- About a 75% chance of harm
- Definitely will be harmed
- Will not be harmed because a climate disaster will not occur

2. If a climate disaster were to occur in your local area, how much, if at all, do you think it would harm the following?

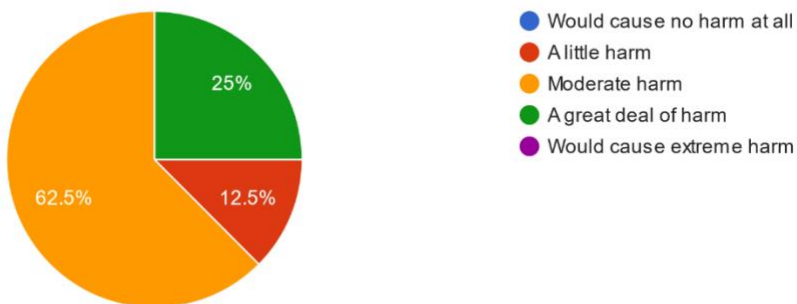
A. Your health
8 responses



B. The health of others in your family
8 responses



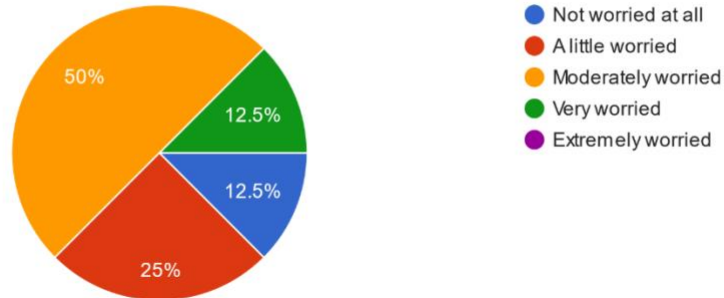
C. The health of others in your community
8 responses



3. How worried, if at all, are you about the effects of a climate disaster on the following?

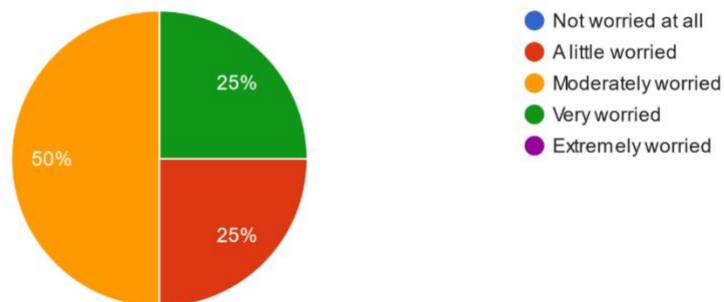
A. Your health

8 responses



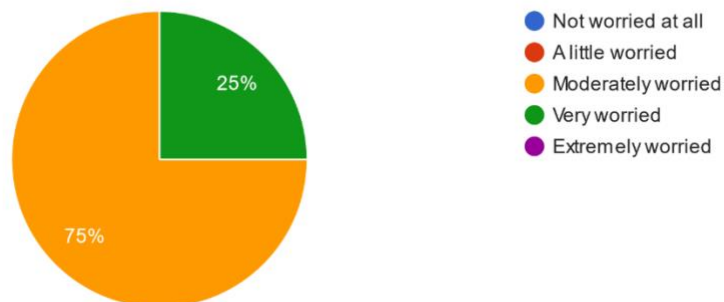
B. The health of others in your family

8 responses



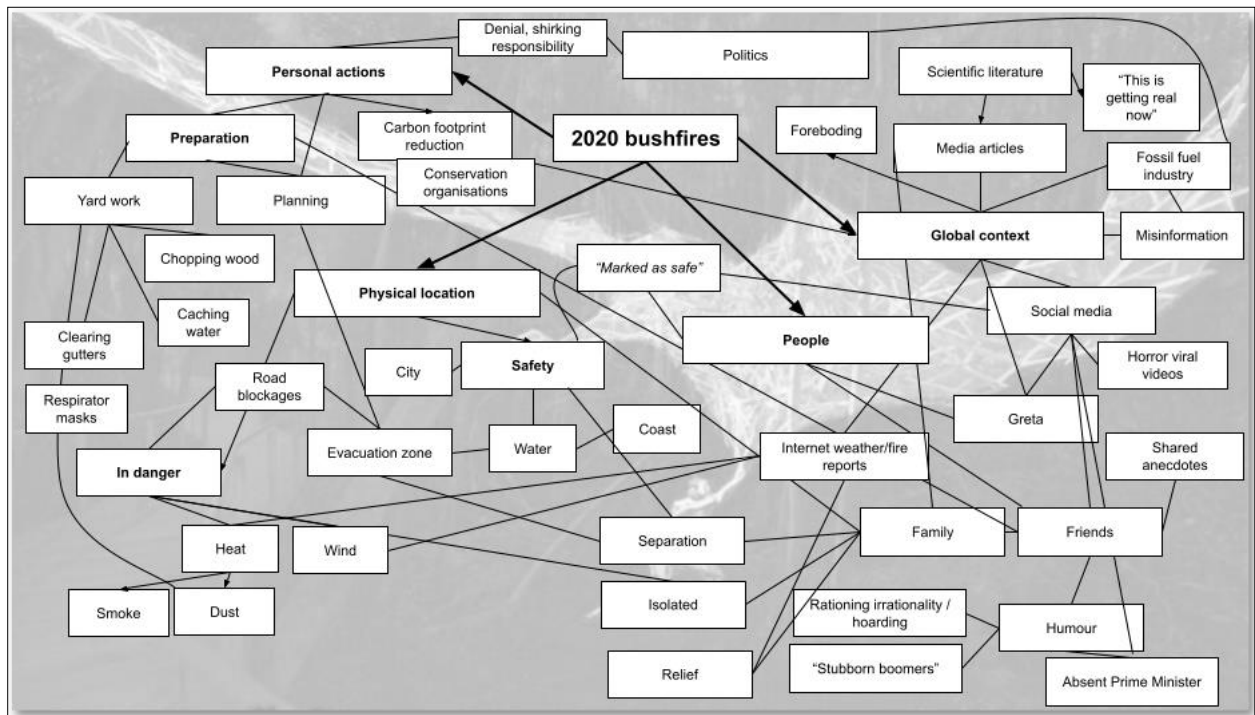
C. The health of others in your community

8 responses

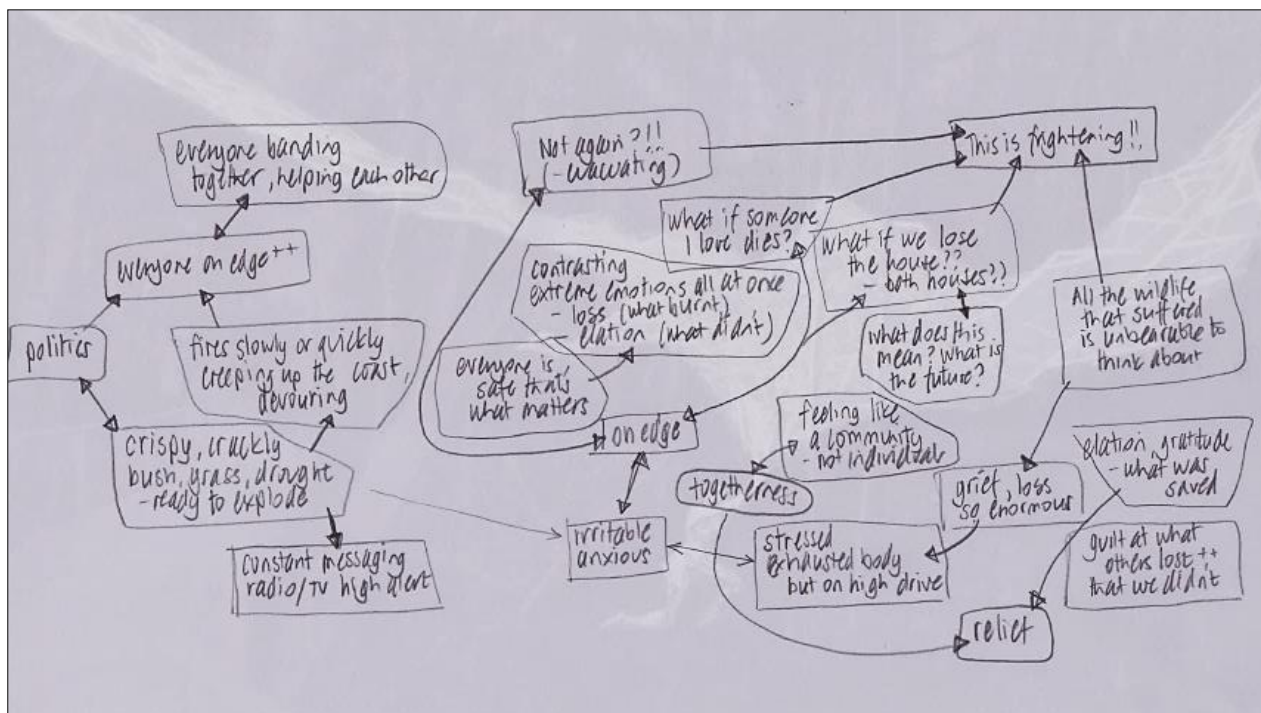


Returned concept maps

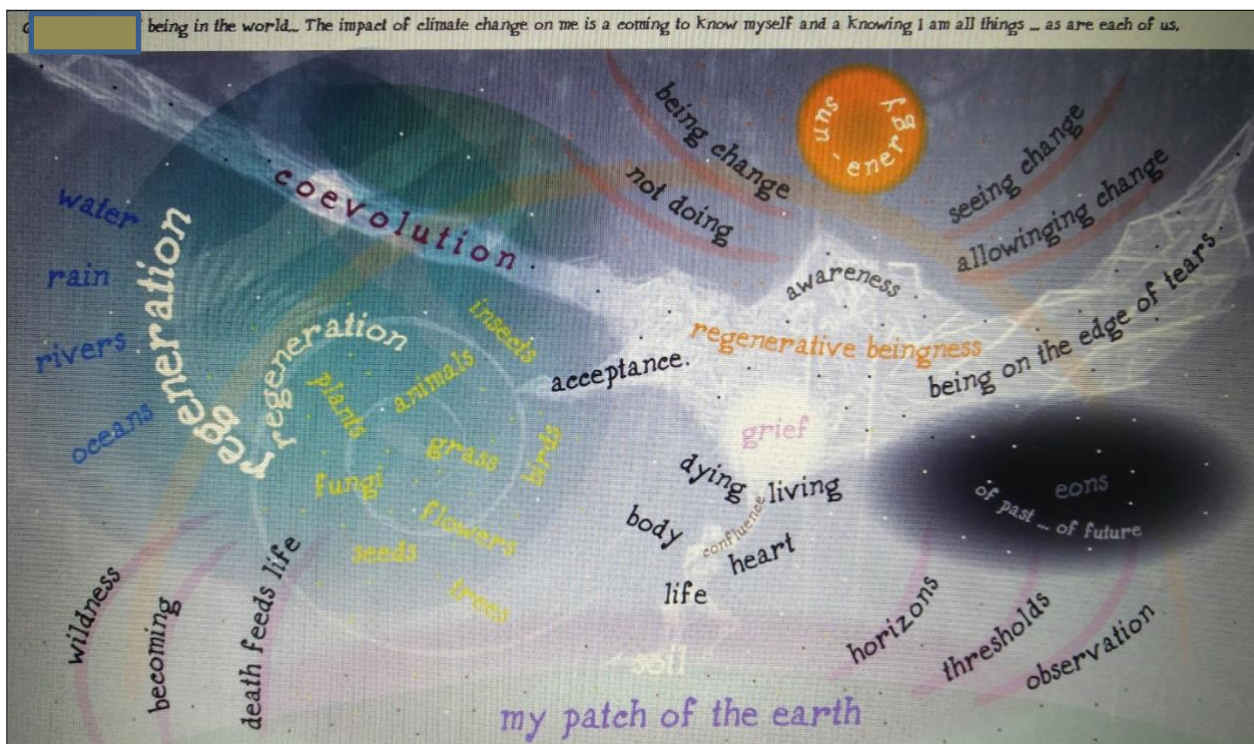




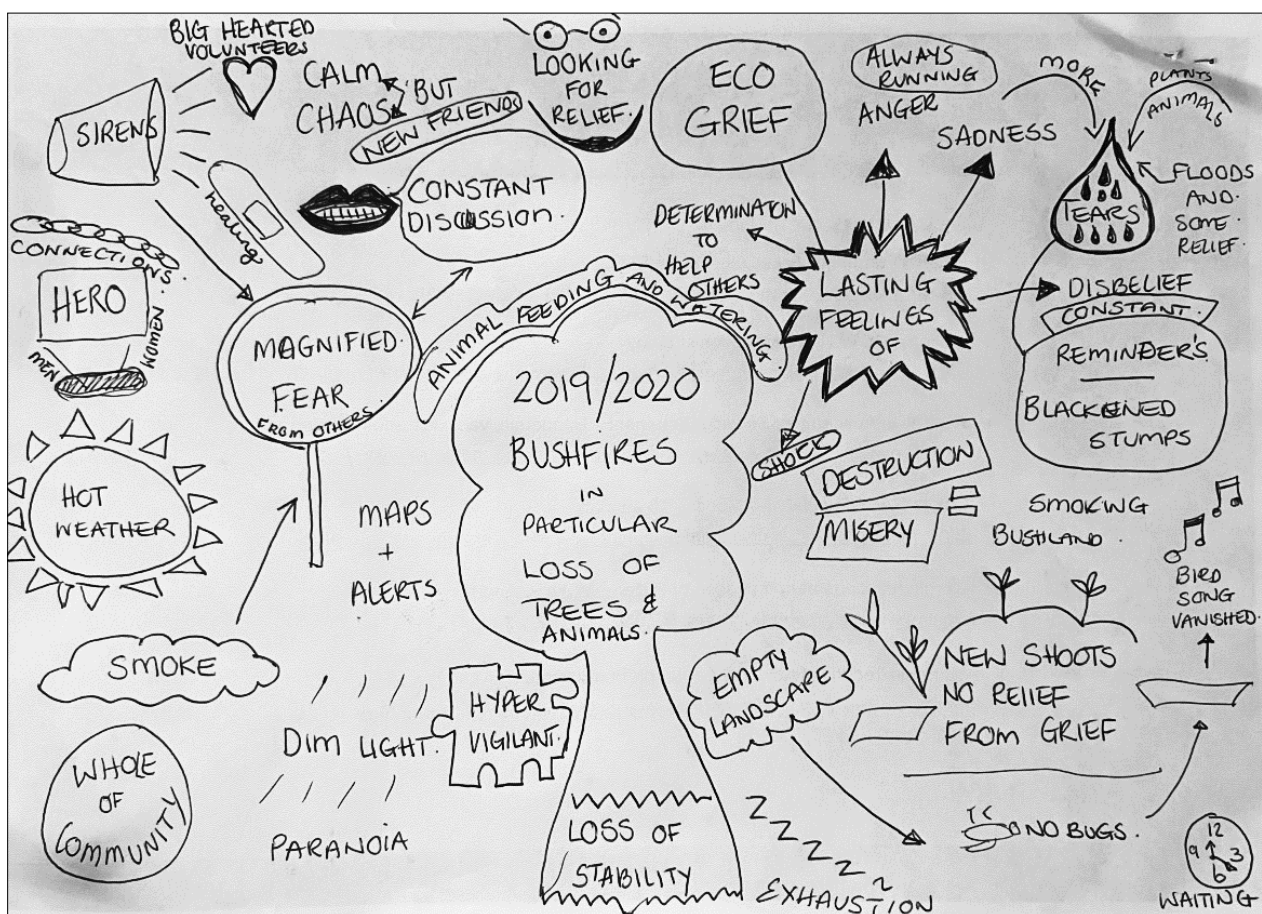
#03MALE38-47, Participant Concept Map, 2021



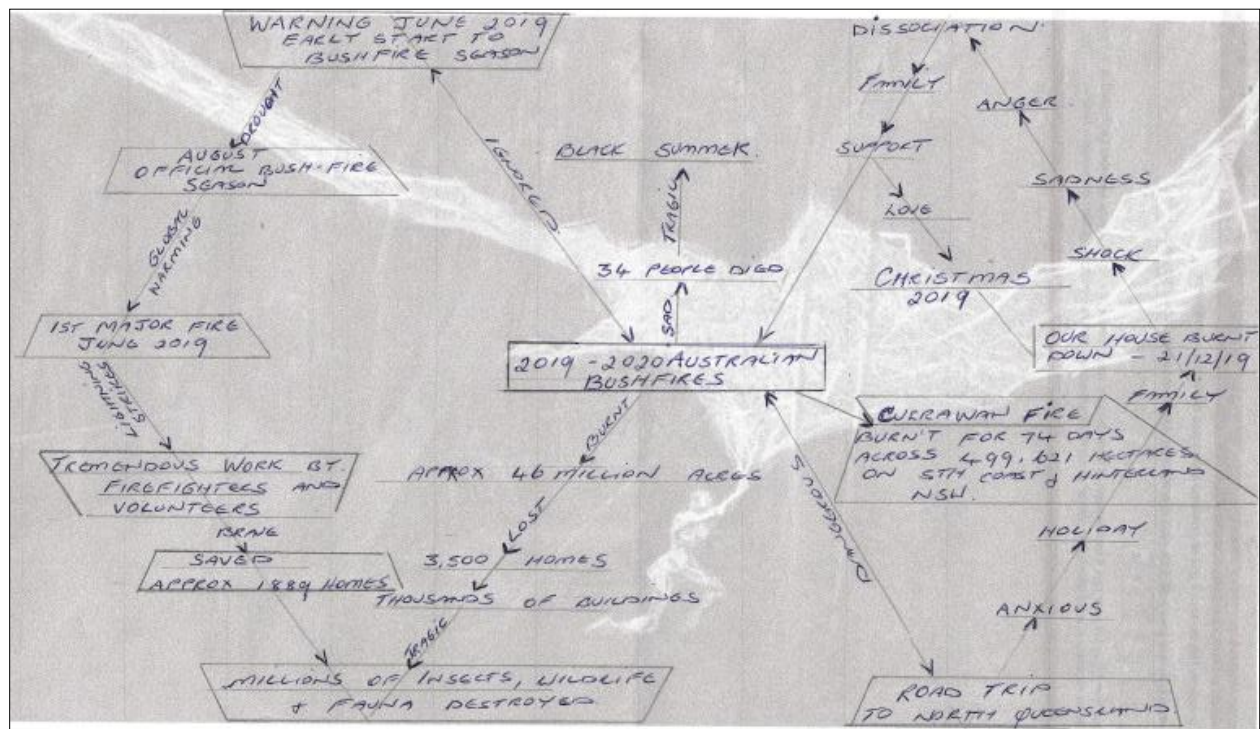
#04FEMALE48-57, Participant Concept Map, 2021



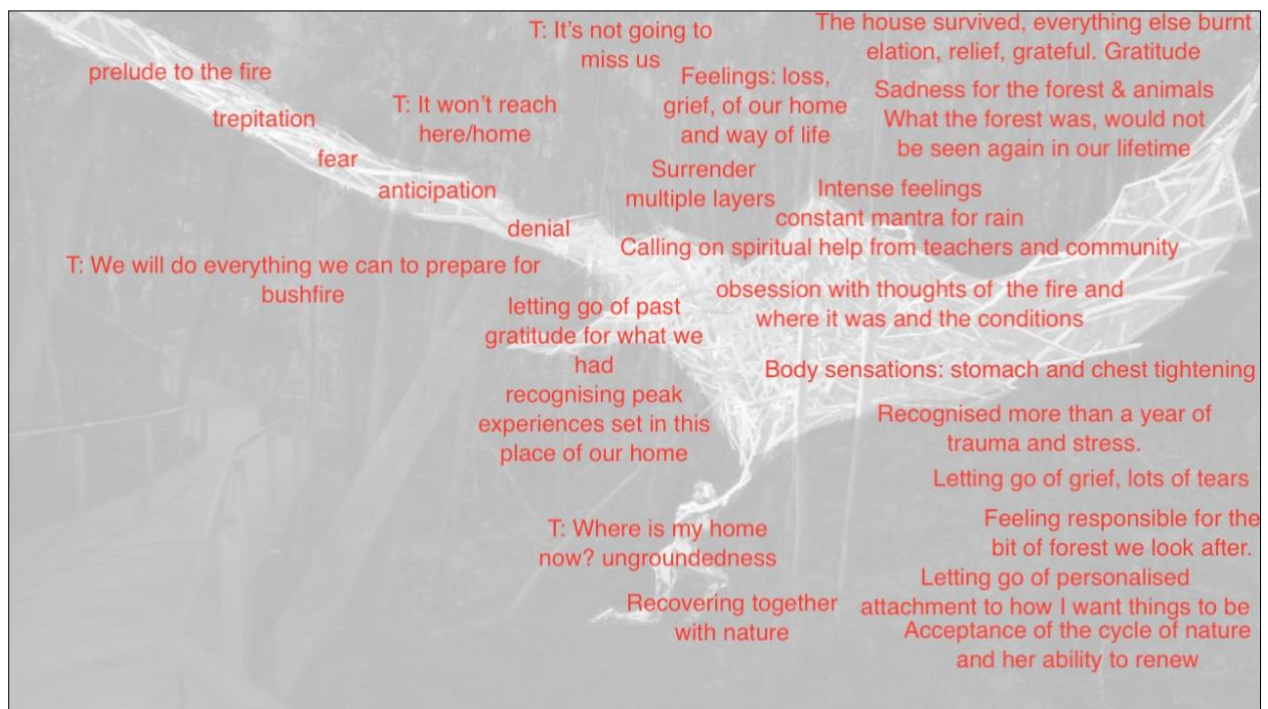
#05FEMALE48-57, Participant Concept Map, 2021



#06FEMALE48-57, Participant Concept Map, 2021



#07FEMALE58-67, Participant Concept Map, 2021



#08FEMALE58-67, Participant Concept Map, 2021

Summary of concept maps

PARTICIPANT	EMOTIONS	SENSORY ASPECTS	ACTIONS
#01FEMALE68-77	Concept mapping: worry, anxiety.	Bushfire, sirens screaming, black sky, eerie orange light, frozen in heat.	Fire approaching, preparing house, evacuation, packing car.
#02FEMALE58-67	Concept mapping: fear, disorientation, disintegration, fragmentation, alarm, panic, overwhelmed, dissociation, too big to handle, grief, vulnerable.	Fires.	Packing, pulsing, alarmed, disappear.
#03MALE38-47	Concept mapping: separation, isolation, relief, horror.	Bushfires, heat, wind, smoke, dust.	Preparation.
#04FEMALE48-57	Concept mapping: frightened, on edge, irritable, anxious, grief, loss, relief, guilt, elation, uncertainty, overwhelmed.	Crispy, crackly, bush, drought, ready to explode, stressed, exhausted body but on high drive.	Fires slowly or quickly creeping up the coast, devouring, evacuation.
#05FEMALE48-57	Concept mapping: grief, acceptance.	Soil, being on the edge of tears.	Coevolution. Observation. Not-doing.
#06FEMALE48-57	Concept mapping: misery, shock, fear, determination, anger, sadness, disbelief, paranoia, loss of stability.	Bushfires, sirens, hot weather, smoke, dim light, no bugs, bird song vanished.	Always running, hyper vigilant, destruction, tears, waiting.
#07FEMALE58-67	Concept mapping: loss, dissociation, anger, sadness, shock, love, anxiety.	Bushfires, black, drought.	Destruction, burnt, house burnt, evacuation.
#08FEMALE58-67	Concept mapping: trepidation, fear, anticipation, denial, loss, grief, surrender, sadness, elation, relief, gratitude, obsessive thoughts, ungroundedness.	Stomach and chest tightening.	Preparation, evacuation, letting go, tears, recognition of ongoing trauma.

Concept Map Analysis Methods

1. Concept map analysis: the placement of the concept(s) within the map, the connection (or lack of) between and among different levels of concepts (Bayram, 1995) and the physical construction of the maps. A follow-up interview will be offered to participants who present a “network structure” or “nascent net structure” in their returned concept maps. Concept maps will also be disqualified if returned as illustration without hierarchy.
2. Inclusion criteria: “network structure”, “nascent net structure”, hierarchical content in their returned concept maps (Wheeldon 2009).
3. Exclusion criteria: Concept maps will also be disqualified if returned as illustration without hierarchy; if there are no connecting points or hierarchy present.
4. Concept map and follow-up interview analysis: Following data collection, the results will be analyzed based on a revision of Kvale’s (1996) seven stages of doing qualitative research. This process will involve identifying common themes through an amalgam of the maps and the interview transcripts (Wheeldon 2009). These themes will then be connected to broader knowledge contributions drawn from climate psychology and health science literature.

3 FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTIONS

Approach

4 follow-up interviews were held. These were processed into the narrative script and summaries were made by directly annotating onto their previously returned concept maps. The interviews were recorded and will be transcribed in the future.

Summary of follow-up interviews

PARTICIPANT	EMOTIONS	SENSORY ASPECTS	ACTIONS
#01FEMALE68-77	Follow-up interview: grief, relief, fear, overwhelmed. Compassion for self.	Bushfire, sirens screaming, black sky, eerie orange light, frozen in heat.	Fire approaching, preparing house, evacuation, packing car.
#03MALE38-47	Follow-up interview: anxiety, worry, frustration, anger.	Bushfires, heat, wind, smoke, dust.	Preparation.
#04FEMALE48-57	Follow-up interview: not grounded, tired, exhausted.	Crispy, crackly, bush, drought, ready to explode, stressed, exhausted body but on high drive.	Fires slowly or quickly creeping up the coast, devouring, evacuation.
#07FEMALE58-67	Follow-up interview: Anger, frustration.	Bushfires, black, drought.	Destruction, burnt, house burnt, evacuation.

4. FILMS

1. Canopy of Thoughts (Summary Film)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PpHAepYcSeE>

2. Canopy of Thoughts (Performance)

<https://vimeo.com/551674320>

Password: cotpfilm

3. Canopy of Thoughts Workshop

<https://vimeo.com/551668301>

Password: cotwfilm

4. MFA Virtual Event Recording (5th May 2021)

(Post workshop discussion begins at 41:00)

<https://vimeo.com/551685764>

Password: coteventrec

Performance & choreography

The choreography was informed by concept map summary of emotions and intuitive body interactions with the paper; synthesizing emotion, movement and material. The choreography was also a result of repetitive movement sequences and was an active, responsive, dialogue between the performer and the videographer.

Summary of emotions: anxiety, worry, fear, heavy, loss, grief, tired, exhausted, denial, anger, vulnerable, confused, overwhelmed, relief, hope, and love.

Summary of paper interactions: Folding, unfolding, layering, wrapping, compressing, crumpling, tearing, ripping, fragmenting, suspended, and moving.



Film stills, Canopy of Thoughts, performance choreography, Elyssa Sykes-Smith (2021)

Film stills





DISCUSSION

DISCUSSION

The project titled 'Canopy of Thoughts' was undertaken for the MFA thesis project, Architectural Association Interprofessional Studio programme, at the Architectural Association School of Architecture for the 2019 – 2021 graduation cycle.

The project works towards illustrating the problem question: *"How to define and measure experiences of dissociation through the metaphorical relationship of protagonist and narrative that utilises concept mapping techniques and sensory aspects to understand the role of embodiment in climate psychology?"*, and has done so in this project in three stages defined as the pilot study research stage, performative study stage, and MFA event workshop stage. The project and stages were designed and facilitated by Elyssa Sykes-Smith working in collaboration with research participants, research and mental health consultants, and artistic technical collaborators. Artistic events were produced and experienced throughout each of the three project stages that incorporated notions of processing versus presenting, public and private, and worked from different dynamics and structures dependent on the stage of the project. Many forms of media were utilized during the processing and production of artistic events including dialogue, sound, film, body movement, paper and light, within the fields of installation art, performance and health research.

The analysis was provided regarding the various aspects of the project, with some aspects left unresolved and acknowledged for further analysis. At the current stage of the analysis there appears to be evidence which suggests that dissociative states are experienced as a result of climate disasters alongside the predominant states of grief and anxiety, and that the research tools devised in this study appear to be a positive form of engagement for participants that enables them to recollect, reflect, express, process and engage with their imagination in a structured format. In addition to this, another main finding is that the performative study followed by editing the film, and facilitation of the event based online workshop was in fact and continues to be the fundamental way in which to actually process the findings from the stage one pilot research study. The latter finding also supports the problem question with regards to utilising embodied processes to engage with the complex material within climate psychology, both from the point of view of a researcher, audience and participant.

In conclusion my MFA thesis project a 'Canopy of Thoughts' does not conclude at this stage. The outcomes presented in this document alongside the films portray an important stage of art-based processing grounded in many forms of research. A 'Canopy of Thoughts' is a deeply personal project situated in the context of the global climate crisis, constituted by many climate disaster narratives which are *"... folded into and folding into the story of many others... mine, ours, the earths"*.

It is with great passion and determination that I will persevere to bring this project to its full potential, incrementally, and fundamentally through the collaborative method of enquiring and listening to fragmented global narratives to further understand the role of embodiment in climate psychology.

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CREDITS

Film

Directed by Elyssa Sykes-Smith
Script: Elyssa Sykes-Smith
Set design & installation: Elyssa Sykes-Smith
Performance & choreography: Elyssa Sykes-Smith
Videography: Pascal Emmeran
Video editing: Nigel Christensen ASSG
Sound design: Nigel Christensen ASSG
Assistants: Sara Aly & Klaudia Chrzastek

Research

Research design, documentation & facilitation: Elyssa Sykes-Smith
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Programme R&D: Tanja Siems
Studio Master: David McAlmont
Studio Tutor: Argyris Angeli
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