



DProf thesis

**The lived experiences of Awe and connectedness: an  
Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis**  
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# The lived experiences of Awe and connectedness: an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

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# Abstract

This dissertation project explores the lived experiences of awe amongst people in middle adulthood (age 35-65). The research project intends to examine how awe is experienced and made sense of in the immediate term and beyond, and to understand what facilitates the experiences of awe. Seven participants were interviewed using semi-structured interviews about their experiences of awe. The material was analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), and four Group Experiential Themes were identified and discussed: the first details the experiential characteristics of awe in the immediate moment, the second explores the impact of the experiences on the participants' ways of being, and third examined the psychological factors that helped participants to access and experience awe, and the fourth theme explored how participants more broadly perceived and conceptualised awe. The findings were understood and illuminated with references to knowledge gleaned from existing literature on awe, while also contributing a phenomenological and qualitative understanding of the phenomena that has thus far been investigated primarily through experimental and quantitative means. The findings suggest that the experience of awe is expansive, complex, and impactful on one's sense of connectedness and ways of relating with the wider world. It is also suggested that awe is accessible and can be experienced through cultivating favourable psychological conditions.

## **Keywords**

Awe, Connectedness, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, IPA

## **Statement of Authorship**

This dissertation is written by Tilda Xin Jie Yeow with ethical clearance from the New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling and the Psychology Department of Middlesex University London. It is submitted as part of requirements of the New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling and the Psychology Department of Middlesex University London for the Degree of Doctor of Existential Psychotherapy and Counselling (Dprof). The author reports no conflict of interest and assumes the sole responsibility for the content and writing of the dissertation.

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# 1. Introduction

Awe is a complex and self-transcendent emotion that evokes feelings of wonder, reverence, mystery, anxiety, as well as a felt sense of vastness and connectedness. In early religious texts, awe is often cited when one encounters God. Ezekiel, the prophet in the Bible, and Arjuna, the Prince in the Bhagavad Gita, were both described to be utterly overwhelmed by awe in the face of God's revelations. In Taoist philosophy, awe is also an attitude of reverence for the laws of the Universe (Lao & Lau, 1963). In contemporary times, awe has made its way into the awareness of psychologists and researchers who recognize it is a fundamentally human experience with the ability to shift perceptions and even transform one's way of being in the world (Chirico & Yaden, 2018). A body of emerging empirical research indicates that awe positively impacts prosocial behavioural intentions and levels of collective engagement and connection (Bai et al., 2017; Piff et al., 2015; Prade & Saroglou, 2016).

This research study is also birthed from societal and personal observations and concerns. At the societal level, this study situates itself in the context of loneliness, disconnection, and apathy as modern-day ailments with potentially great costs to the health and wellbeing of society. This study is conducted in Canada where the author resides while the thesis is based in the United Kingdom. The issue of loneliness is prevalent in both societies and in fact has become a matter of global concern as the World Health Organisation has warned that loneliness could become a global epidemic (Couto, 2023) with serious health risks including depression (Cacioppo et al., 2006) and

heart disease (Valtorta et al., 2016). Research by the Centre for Economics and Business Research (CEBR) in 2017 estimates that disconnected communities cost the UK economy a total of £32 billion every year. Meanwhile, the National Institute on Ageing in Canada has also raised concerns and explored possible solutions to address loneliness amongst older adults (National Institute on Ageing, 2022).

In addition to loneliness and disconnectedness, apathy towards social, political and environmental issues is also a cause of concern. Political apathy and disinterest amongst non-voters are concerns in democracies around the world (Depner, 2020; Oxenham, 2017). Meanwhile, neuroscience suggests that hard evidence on climate change and its profound existential threats may do little to rouse people into action, since our brains are hardwired to respond to immediate risks and not danger that lies decades away (Harman, 2014), thus prompting the need to understand what may be more helpful in igniting connection and interest in the wellbeing of the world.

In 'The Spirituality of Awe: Challenges to the Robotic Revolution', Kirk Schneider (2019) advocates for awe-based living as a way to preserve our humanity in the age of the robotic revolution and our increasing reliance on technology and instant results that diminish our capacity to engage deeply with life. Chen and Mongrain (2020) argue that by recognizing interconnectedness with the vast world and strengthening one's connections with humanity, awe reduces preoccupations with the self in the digital and social media era, which carries psychological costs such as depression and loneliness. In 2020, the COVID-19 global pandemic and the restrictions imposed by most

governments on physical socialising has also brought about an acute awareness of the impact of loneliness and the need for social connectedness (Banerjee & Rai, 2020).

In light of the societal context as described and the current literature on awe and the accompanying sense of connectedness with the world, this research project hopes to delve deeper into the phenomenon and contribute knowledge to the field of psychotherapy and mental health care. From the existential perspective, Schneider (2011) advocates for greater understanding of awe in the field of psychology and psychotherapy, proposing that it is not merely meaning that people seek in their lives as is often understood in Existential therapy, but embodiment, thrill and 'lift of participating in something much larger than themselves or even their language can express.' (Schneider, 2011, p.249). Furthermore, isolation is one of the major existential concerns that are often encountered in therapy. Existential isolation can be understood as a form of isolation resulting from 'feeling alone in one's experience, as though no one understands us or reacts to the world in the same way as us' (Pinel et al., 2017). Yalom (1980) describes existential isolation as the 'unbridgeable' gap between self and other as there is a limit to how well we can understand the experiences of another. He proposes an existential conflict that arises between our desire to be part of a larger whole, and our awareness of our fundamental isolation. Yalom's understanding of existential isolation assumes that feelings of isolation arise out of our inability to fully understand another, yet awe appears to offer a sense of connectedness that not only transcends the need for conceptual understanding for another, but also facilitates the awareness of the self being part of a larger whole. It simultaneously dissolves the

boundaries between self and other while enhancing our sense of connectedness (Yaden et al., 2017). With greater knowledge about the physiological and psychological benefits of awe (Allen, 2018), it is no surprise that there is effort by psychologists and psychotherapists to explore the therapeutic implications of awe. Schneider (2009) and Bonner and Friedman (2016) have suggested ways in which individuals or therapists can help themselves and clients access awe in their lives. Chen and Mongrain (2020) and Schneider (2009) have also highlighted the barriers in experiencing awe and the factors that promote them. Beyond the benefits of awe experiences that are reported in empirical research, it may be helpful to gain an understanding of what the experiences of awe mean to people and how the experiences are integrated into their lives. Before learning about *how* to cultivate and access awe, psychotherapists may benefit from knowing about *what* the experience of awe entails and what meanings and insights people derive from it. Hence, the study hopes to provide greater knowledge and understanding of awe experiences which may present possibilities for psychotherapists working in societies challenged by disconnectedness and disengagement.

On a more personal level, I have found myself being profoundly moved by the myriad of feelings and perceptions that are evoked in my experiences of awe. There is a deep sense of connectedness to the Universe and to my own existence, along with immense gratitude to all people and the mysterious workings of life. In my states of awe, I have also felt an affection for life and people, and a greater desire to contribute to the world. On my path towards being a practitioner of existential psychotherapy, I came across the visual metaphor of anxiety being the dizziness of freedom that is felt in the face of

infinite possibilities as one stands on the edge of a cliff (Kierkegaard et al., 1980, p.51). Even as I understood this, I had always imagined a different scenario, where a man stares up and ahead into the vastness and is awe-struck and awe-inspired towards fruitful living.

Given the profoundly nourishing and potentially transformational impact of my personal experiences of awe, my curiosity has led to learning about current understandings of the phenomenon in the field of psychology and psychotherapy. Psychologists are becoming increasingly interested in awe (Schneider, 2017), and the discussion of awe has since moved from the religious and mystical realms to the domain of the secular. Early works that provided a conceptual understanding of awe, such as Kirk Schneider's in-depth interviews in 'Awakening to Awe' (2009) and Keltner and Haidt's (2003) seminal paper 'Approaching awe, a moral, spiritual, and aesthetic emotion', have paved the way for deeper explorations into specific and unique features of awe.

In recent empirical studies and writing, it is suggested that awe increases one's tendency to engage in prosocial behaviour (Bai et al., 2017; Piff et al., 2015; Prade & Saroglou, 2016). In addition, a study by Yang et al. (2018) also points to a similar impact that awe has on ecological behaviour and the individual's connectedness to nature. While researchers have been able to measure the behavioural intent of subjects as a response to awe, how that occurs remains a mystery. Explanatory theories that have been proposed include the 'small-self' effect (Bai et al., 2017) where one feels diminished in the presence of something larger, a greater sense of connection

with others (Shiota et al., 2007) and the idea that awe quietens the ego and transforms it to be more attuned to interdependent concerns (Perlin & Li, 2020). In my search for more knowledge, I noticed a stark contrast between the emerging body of quantitative research that tests for re-conceptualized ideas and hypotheses and the dearth of qualitative research into the lived experiences of awe. Schneider (2017) discusses the resurgence of awe in psychology and highlights the perils of attempting to understand awe primarily through quantitative research, such as the reductionism of the phenomena into measurable indicators, and the oversight into the longer term and broader social implications of the transformative impact of awe. This resonates strongly with me, and the findings of quantitative research has undoubtedly piqued my curiosity and intrigue into the nuances of awe, and I am particularly drawn to the feelings of connectedness and engagement with the world that it apparently inspires.

## **1.1 Research Aims**

The overall research objective is to understand the experiences of awe and connectedness in the research sample and how these experiences impact one's way of living. Awe can encompass a vast range of experiences ranging from the shock and awe in the face of disasters (e.g. wars, hurricanes) to the awe of persons with great ability (e.g. athletes, artists). The study intends to focus on learning about the experiences of awe that encompass a sense of connectedness, in particular

- i. The felt experience awe as it happens, such as the emotions, thoughts, and sensations that arise.

- ii. The ways in which individuals make sense of their awe experiences and how these experiences have come to influence their ways of being.
- iii. The factors that enable or facilitate their awe experiences.

The research aims to capture the qualitative experiences of awe. The objective is to obtain phenomenological description of the experience as well as to understand how participants have come to make sense of their own experiences. Through my literature review, current research in awe appears to be largely quantitative where preconceived hypotheses are tested under laboratory settings with induced awe. At present, the major contributors to qualitative understandings of awe come from Schneider (2009)'s compilation of personal accounts analysed informally with principles of reflective-phenomenology, and Weger and Wagemann's (2018) heuristic first-person inquiry into the experience of awe and wonder. The key contribution of the proposed research to the existing body of knowledge is the insights gained from learning about the lived experiences of awe and developing a richer, more in-depth understanding of its influences on connectedness with the wider world that may be missed in quantitative studies.

The study uses Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to explore the awe experiences of people aged between 35 to 65 years of age. The rationale for the sample demographics and research methodology will be further discussed in the following chapters.



## **1.2 Overview of chapters**

In the next chapter, existing literature on awe will be reviewed through the theoretical perspectives of psychology, philosophy, as well as current research that are relevant to this study. A broad understanding and discussion of what is currently known about awe and how it is understood will ground the research project and allow it to situate itself as a contributor of knowledge.

In Chapter 3, I will discuss my rationale for why I have chosen IPA as the research methodology based on my research objectives and epistemological positioning in the study.

Chapter 4 details the steps and methods used to actualize the study, including how participants are recruited and interviewed, and how the data is analysed.

In Chapter 5, I present the findings of the analysis. Group experiential themes and sub-themes that have emerged from the interviews are outlined and details are provided in the form of verbatims from the interview transcripts. At this stage, the focus is on bringing to light the participants' experiences which are presented without further discussion and references to other forms of literature and knowledge. Although there is my involvement in the interpretation and organisation of the results, at this stage the readers are able to engage with the participants' experiences and make sense of the findings

Chapter 6 is where I discuss the findings and how they relate to the existing body of literature, critically examining the areas of resonance and dissonance, and highlighting the ways in which the findings contribute to knowledge of the subject area. In addition,

the study will also be evaluated and significance of the research and implications for clinical practice of psychotherapy is discussed, followed by recommendations for future research into the phenomenon of awe. Finally, a reflexive exploration illuminates my personal engagement with the research process.

Chapter 7 concludes the study with a summary of what the research has accomplished vis-a-vis its aims.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Aim & method of literature review

The aim of the literature review is to examine the research and theoretical writings on awe, with a particular focus on how people experience and are affected by it. A narrative literature review is conducted with the objective of gaining a broad understanding. The review integrates both focused research findings and broader understandings of related phenomena from the fields of psychology and philosophy.

In the search for relevant literature, a combination of keyword searches in academic databases as well as ancestry search is used, by referring to the citations and references made in relevant literature. As awe research was a relatively new and niche in 2019 when the first phase of literature review begun, ancestry search was helpful as authors were often cross-referencing relevant research and findings. Literature that made links between awe and connectedness to the wider world were included, as were relevant literature about related phenomena (e.g. peak experiences, sublime experiences) as they offer helpful insight. The date range for research literature inclusion was set at year 2000 onwards to focus on contemporary studies that reflect the current understanding of the awe. The following table lists the major databases and keywords that were used.

*Table 1: Literature Review Databases and Keywords*

Databases	EBSCOhost PubMed Central® (PMC) Taylor & Francis Online  Science Direct Directory of Open Access Journals  Sage Premier  Springer
Keywords	Awe  Awe, Social  Awe, Prosocial  Awe, Collective  Awe, Connectedness  Sublime, awe  Peak experiences, awe
No. of hits	3076
No. of outcomes	160 outcomes of relevance

Scholarly and peer-reviewed literature made links between awe, connectedness, and collective engagement were included. There were also some literature written by psychotherapists about awe, however they were excluded as they were opinion pieces

that were intended to inspire readers to think about the subject while I wanted to focus on literature that contributed more research and theories that were more robust.

I will first elaborate upon the definition of awe before further examining the current research on awe and the associated sense of collective engagement and connectedness, and finally discussing the broader philosophical and psychological writings of the phenomena.

## **2.2 Definition and Conceptual Understanding of Awe**

Linguistic definitions of awe point to a complex and somewhat paradoxical nature of the emotion. The etymology of 'awe' traces its roots to the 13th century Old English ('ege') and Old Norse ('agi) meanings of 'terror, dread, great reverence' (Online Etymology Dictionary, n.d.). Today, the Oxford Dictionary (Stevenson, 2010) describes it as a 'feeling of reverential respect mixed with fear or wonder'. The common understanding of awe has since evolved from its older roots that emphasised fear, to its contemporary and popular usage that is closely related to respect, wonder and more pleasurable emotions. In the field of research on awe, Gordon et al. (2017) acknowledges the disproportionately greater interest in awe as a positive emotion and also found that one of every four to ten awe experiences are tinged with fear and threat, suggesting that some experiences may still hold both pleasurable and unpleasurable emotions, even if contemporary interest focuses on the pleasurable side of awe. Perhaps, modern ways of living have enabled people to manage the day-to-day experiences of threat and

science and technology have helped people to make sense of and navigate the potential dangers of the world.

In the pursuit of understanding awe, one will inevitably come across wonder as a closely associated emotion. Weger and Wagemann (2018) noted in their study on awe and wonder that the two words are often used synonymously and interchangeably, although some researchers attempt to provide more definitive distinctions. Gallagher et al. (2015) defined awe as a direct and initial experience when encountering something amazing, incomprehensible, or sublime, while wonder is defined as a reflective experience that is initiated when one is unable to comprehend things using familiar conceptual frameworks, thus inviting open questions. They suggest that awe being a more immediate experience motivates a reflective experience of wonder. This seems to resonate with research that examined language use in descriptions of awe and wonder. Darbor et al. (2015) found that awe used significantly fewer insight (e.g. 'think') and causation words (e.g. 'because') than wonder, and more perception words (e.g. 'observing') than wonder. Similarly, Weger and Wagemann (2018) propose that wonder inspires the desire to understand, while awe inspires the wish to let the phenomenon shine and to acknowledge and unite. These studies seem to observe and suggest that awe and wonder, while being closely related, differ in the sense that wonder invites more active cognitive engagement and analytical activity than awe, which is a direct experience that involves a momentary suspension of active thinking in favour of allowing the phenomenon to unravel and to be perceived. Nevertheless, in the

presence of a phenomenon that invites awe, wonder may be very well present and vice-versa.

### **2.2.1 Awe, the sublime, and peak experiences**

In addition to linguistic definitions, awe can also be understood conceptually through the works of philosophers and psychologists. Philosophers have elucidated insights about the sublime, while modern day psychologists have researched about awe. Clewis et al. (2021) point out the many overlapping features between awe and the sublime, indicating that literatures of both could inform one another. Philosophers have conceptualised the sublime, which Edmund Burke (1767) describes as being the cause of the strongest emotions which the individual is capable of feeling, including both pain and pleasure. In the highest degree, total astonishment is experienced, and to a lesser degree, admiration, reverence, or respect. The sublime can make us feel insignificant and can be experienced not only through religious experiences, but also through sensory, perceptual experiences (e.g., arts, nature). Burke also laid out some qualities of the sublime, such as vastness, infinity, magnificence and power, as well as obscurity over clarity. These qualities are accounted for in Keltner and Haidt's (2003) seminal paper that provides a prototypical concept of awe, where vastness and a need for accommodation are two essential characteristics of the experience. Kant (1790/1914) also contributes to this understanding with his distinction of the mathematically sublime and the dynamically sublime. The former involves the subject being cognitively frustrated and humbled by the object that is too vast to be comprehended by our limited

senses, and the latter refers to the experience of a potential existential threat, where our ability to reason overcomes the feeling of fear when we recognize that we are in a position of safety (e.g. watching a volcano eruption from a distance). According to Kant, the sublime gives rise to a simultaneous feeling of displeasure arising from the limitations of our imagination and senses, and pleasure from the fact that our awareness of our limitations affirms our powers of reason. Schopenhauer further adds that the sublime is experienced when a person can achieve a calm contemplation of the object despite it being existentially threatening by consciously liberating oneself from the threat to the individual self (Schopenhauer & Payne, 1966). For Schopenhauer, the sense of elevation in the sublime comes not from having our powers of reasoning affirmed, but rather from feeling ourselves as transcendental beings that are part of the world,

*“If we lose ourselves in the contemplation of the infinite greatness of the universe in space and time, meditate on the thousands of years that are past or to come...we feel ourselves dwindle to nothing; as individuals, as living bodies, as transient phenomena of will, we feel ourselves pass away and vanish into nothing like drops in the ocean. But at once there rises...the immediate consciousness that all these worlds exist only as our idea, only as modifications of the eternal subject of pure knowing, which we find ourselves to be as soon as we forget our individuality, and which is the necessary supporter of all worlds and all times the condition of their possibility. The vastness of the world which disquieted us before, rests now in us; our dependence upon it is annulled by its dependence*



*upon us. All this, however, does not come at once into reflection, but shows itself merely as the felt consciousness that in some sense or other (which philosophy alone can explain) we are one with the world, and therefore not oppressed, but exalted by its immensity” (p.205)*

Schopenhauer's take on how the vastness of the world exalts rather than oppresses us has also been investigated in modern psychological experiments and theories, which will be discussed in later sections.

In summary, Burke's (1767) idea of the sublime introduces the idea that the experience of awe could entail paradoxical feelings of pleasure and pain, Kant (1790/1914) provides a possible account of how reason prevents us from slipping into terror in the midst of awe, while Schopenhauer illuminates the transcendental aspects of the sublime that also includes our relationship with the world around us.

In addition to the sublime, a close relative of awe may be what Maslow (1962) terms as peak experiences. In his study, Maslow accounts that the most psychologically healthy individuals tended to report mystical experiences and moments of great awe where one feels one with the world, truly belonging to it and part of it. Peak experiences differ from the sublime in the sense that Maslow (1959) emphasises there is an absence of pain and displeasure arising from threat and danger, but are in contrast 'perfect, complete, and needs nothing else' (p.50), and may involve intense happiness or even ecstasy.

Another point of departure between peak experiences and the sublime, and that which brings it closer to the experience of awe as would be explored in this study, is that in peak experiences the stimuli or object can have very different characteristics though the subjective experiences tend to have more similarities. While the philosophers' references to the sublime focuses on the grandeur of nature and art, Maslow sees that peak experiences can arise from the mundane and the familiar and are accessible to everyone. Despite Maslow's claim and conceptualization of the many similar and universal characteristics of peak experiences, he acknowledges that it is not clear why some peak experiences result in people feeling alert and excited, while others feel more quiet and serene. As with peak experiences and the sublime, there is much to explore in the phenomenon of awe and this research project aims to capture qualitatively the experiences of awe and how they are felt and made sense of.

Beyond a momentary experience and after the 'peak', awe is also an attitude and way of being that is an important element in self-development. Ren (2010) referred to the Confucian understanding of awe as reverence and an agent of transformation towards ethical and virtuous living. An analysis of awe through the lens of Aristotle points to its qualities of intellectual and moral elevation and suggests its crucial role in *eudaimonia*—the Aristotelian notion of human flourishing (Kristjánsson, 2017).

A definition of awe that encompasses both the heightened emotional experiences and attitude towards life is Schneider's (2017, p105) conceptualization of awe being the 'comingling of thrill and anxiety, humility and wonder of living'. Schneider also suggested two main forms of awe, the "quick boil" form that is often reflected in quantitative studies that elicit an emotional response with stimuli, and the "slow simmer"

form that comes from lived experiences, struggles, and engagements with the many conundrums of life. Furthermore, Schneider (2011, pp.249) also describes awe as the 'lift of participating in something much larger than themselves or even their language can express'. Here, the concept of vastness echoes that in the experiences of the sublime. While Schopenhauer proposes that one is exalted by vastness in the experience of the sublime, Schneider suggests awe has an uplifting effect. In the sense that awe can be experienced as going beyond oneself, it can be understood as a self-transcendent experience (Yaden et al., 2017) where there is a transient mental state of decreased self-salience and increased feelings of connectedness and unity. By integrating the various perspectives of awe as discussed thus far, the proposed definition of awe for this research project is 'the sense of respect, wonder, connectedness, and being part of something larger than the self.'

### **2.3 Awe's effects on prosociality and engagement with the wider world.**

This section examines the research and writings on awe's impact on prosociality and collective engagement. There are three broad categories of findings and theories of how awe induces prosocial behaviour- through self-diminishment and decreased self-importance; the need to restore meaning in one's life; and an expanded concept of the self.

#### The Small-Self effect as a mediating influence on prosociality

A number of recent studies have found that awe has a measurable impact on prosocial behaviours such as generosity and helping (Prade & Saroglou, 2016), collective engagement (Bai et al., 2017), and ethical decision-making (Piff et al., 2015). A commonality in these studies is the hypothesis that awe, by diminishing the self and decreasing self-importance, enables one to put aside one's own self-interests in service of the collective. This is also referred to as the 'small self' effect of awe. In a study by Bai et al. (2017) on awe's effects on self-diminishment and collective engagement, it was found that awe enabled more collective engagement by diminishing the sense of self and shifting attention away from the self. 242 participants, with a mean age of 36 years of age recalled and wrote about their experiences of awe, shame, and a neutral control (ie. doing laundry), and rated their perceived self-size, self-focus tendency, collective engagement, as well other measures such as self-esteem and sense of power. Assessment was made using questionnaires and scales, such as the Inclusion of Community in Self Scale (Mashek et al., 2007) that measures the degree that an individual feels belonging to their community, an indicator of community connectedness. It is noteworthy that in the study, awe was found to increase the degree in which participants feel engaged with their community by diminishing their sense of self, yet without reducing self-esteem or a personal sense of power. These contrasted feelings of shame that reduced both perceived self-size and self-esteem. This finding also contrasted with the conceptualization of the 'small-self' in the study of awe's effect on the diminishment of self and the increase in prosocial behaviours such as ethical decision-making and generosity (Piff et al., 2015). They defined the 'small-self' as a relative diminishment of the individual self and its interests against something perceived

to be more vast and powerful than oneself. Consequently, self-diminishment was measured according to the extent in which participants agree with statements such as feeling that their own concerns matter less in the grand scheme of things and feeling small relative to something more powerful.

The limitation of the concept of self-diminishment (Piff et al., 2015) is that feeling less powerful and important does not really account for why a person would choose to orient towards the collective. It is worth wondering if people give up on their own interests only because they are small and that their concerns matter less than that of the larger whole, or if there are other psychological factors involved, such as having greater care and concern for humanity, or having an emotional resonance with community values. While Bai et al. (2017) have shown that awe increases in community connectedness, there is much to be explored about what connectedness means for the participants and how that translates to the ways in which they may give up self-interests for the collective good.

#### Prosocial acts are a way to restore meaning in life

A recent study by Rivera et al. (2019) also challenges the direct relationship between the small self-effect and prosocial behaviour. In their studies, awe was also shown to induce feelings of self-diminishment. However, it also had a negative indirect effect on 'meaning in life', as measured using the established Meaning in Life Questionnaire by Steger et al., (2006). This apparent incongruence was highlighted in the analysis

because it contradicted the researchers' expectations that prosocial behaviour enhances meaning in life. The researchers proposed that rather than directly increasing concern for the wider community by decreasing self-importance as was previously thought (Piff et al., 2015), awe may trigger the need to restore meaningfulness of one's life through prosocial acts. They also suggest that the momentary negative effect on meaning in life initiates a restructuring of worldviews that may eventually support long-term positive changes in meaning in life. This is a salient point as the researchers, in administering the Meaning In Life Questionnaire, had only focused on the portion of measuring the *presence* of, and not the *search* for meaning in life. There is much room for exploration in understanding the effect that awe has on one's search for meaning in life, and the role that prosociality plays in one's search for meaning.

#### Awe may encourage prosocial behaviour by expanding the self-concept

Perlin and Li (2020) have provided an important perspective that challenges and further enhances the current understanding of the 'small-self' (Piff et al., 2015) which is described as the relative diminishment of the individual self and its interests against something perceived to be greater and more powerful. Their theoretical analysis questions the fundamental assumptions that researchers make about the 'small-self' and puts forth the notion that there are multiple layers of selfhood. From their perspective of personality psychology, awe stimulates the development of the ego such that it also considers interdependence and respect for both self and others. Thus, it suggests that it is not the 'me-oriented' self that becomes more prosocial because it

recognizes that it is of relatively low importance than others. Instead, awe expands the sense of self to include the values and aspirations of others.

This theory resonates with the analysis of astronauts' accounts of the 'Overview Effect' by Yaden et al. (2016). Based on content analysis of public statements, the writers infer that the astronauts' experiences of awe and self-transcendence may sometimes settle into long-term changes in how they relate and feel greater affiliation with humanity and the Earth. They cited astronaut Edgar Mitchell's accounts of his experience that involved a concern and passion for the well-being of the Earth, and a global consciousness and compulsion to take action in addressing the un-wellness of the world.

In addition to an expanded consciousness and an orientation towards others, Mitchell's statements also reflect an emotional connection and care for the state of humanity. Although one might argue that an astronaut's intense experience is out of reach to most people, what is crucial to note is that the link between awe and prosocial behaviour can potentially involve a complex mix of emotions and processes (e.g. deep dissatisfaction, passion, concern) that go beyond self-diminishment.

The concept of an expanded self is also captured in Weger and Wagemann (2018)'s first-person phenomenological inquiry into the experience of awe. In their record of the qualitative experiences of awe, they made an observation which directly contradicts the notion of the static small self:

*“We noticed an immense respect and reverence regarding what we might call the intricate and profound creativity of nature...the experience of inner expansion to the greatness of the experience – it was uplifting and moving beyond the mundane and trivial daily struggles, i.e., the very opposite of a small self: an expanded self – a vast self.” (pp.8)*

This account highlights both a reverence to a larger force (nature) which might suggest an initial recognition of one’s own humility without any sense of self-diminishment, and also an expansion of the self that resonates with Perlin and Li’s (2020) notion of an enriched sense of self. Although Weger and Wagemann (2018) made no reference as to whether their experiences of awe and feelings of an expanded self had any impact on their desire or intentions towards collective engagement, their account highlights the point that the small-self effect, while extensively discussed in pre-conceptualized quantitative studies, is not in fact uniformly experienced.

Furthermore, there may be a co-existence of the individual’s qualitative experience (e.g., feeling vast) and a cognitive appraisal of one’s smallness in the grander scheme of things. Hence, it is crucial that one delves deeper into what one means by the small-self. For example, in research on awe’s effect on self-diminishment and prosociality (Piff et al., 2015), participants were asked to rate the extent to which they agreed on feeling “the presence of something greater than myself”. This statement was meant to



measure the small-self effect. However, as Weger and Wagemann described, being in the presence of something great does not necessarily mean that one is made smaller.

## **2.4 Awe: Connectedness with the wider world**

Thus far, we have seen that the experience of awe could elicit some level of perception or change of the self, be it in the 'small-self' effect or the expanded self. Another significant dimension that links awe to collective engagement is the sense of connectedness that awe evokes in the subject.

Bonner and Friedman (2011)'s analysis of Schneider's (2007) interviews revealed 'Connectedness' as a significant feature of awe.

*"I am caught up in experiencing being a part of something larger than myself and larger than my previous experience" (Schneider, 2009, p. 125).*

*"Awe conjures up the feeling of being a small, separate entity, and yet significant somehow and connected to the universe" (pp. 81–82).*

These statements give an indication that in addition to a perceived self-size or self-concept, the simultaneous sense of connectedness or situatedness in the world (ie. a part of something) is also an important feature. This is coherent with empirical findings from a study by Nelson-Coffey et al. (2019) using virtual-reality and video stimulated

awe. The study found that an increase in self-relevant thoughts predicted an increase in connectedness and vice-versa. The researchers propose that in the experience of awe, people simultaneously contemplate on the self and the connection with others and relate the experience to themselves before adjusting their own self-concepts. This contrasts with the notion that attention shifts away from the self in experiences of awe (Bai et al., 2017) and also resonates with Sundararajan's (2002) point of view that self-reflexivity is a significant feature of the awe experience. This apparent contrast highlights the potentially complex experience of the self in relation to the world as individuals experience awe, and it will be interesting to explore if, and how do participants simultaneously think beyond themselves while being self-reflexive.

As for the 'object' to which one feels connected to, Bonner and Friedman's (2011) analysis pointed out that there was considerable variation in what the participants felt connected to in their experiences of awe. Responses of participants included feeling connected with divinity, and some reported a feeling of connectedness towards something non-specific. Although the authors did not discuss their interpretation of what being connected to something non-specific might mean, feelings of connectedness in self-transcendent experiences of awe may reach beyond interpersonal (e.g. people) and physical (e.g. environment) domains to include all of existence (Yaden et al., 2017). The notion of being connected to something non-specific may be more reflective of the expansive and all-encompassing nature of connectedness in awe. Nevertheless, it would be worthwhile for the research project to

further clarify with participants what feeling connected to something non-specific might mean if it emerges in the interview process.

The breadth and extent of connectedness that is experienced in awe has also been investigated by quantitative researchers. Yang et al. (2018) found that awe enhanced feelings of connectedness to nature and increased inclinations towards ecological behaviour. The researchers used the Connectedness to Nature scale (Mayer & Frantz, 2004), which measures the degree to which people feel a part of and emotionally connected to nature. The researchers propose that greater feelings of connection resulted in a diminished distinction in the boundaries between humans and the natural world. This echoes with the inference (Yaden et al., 2016) that awe increased the sense of connection to other people and Earth as a whole, and findings that the awe of nature activates the connection and feelings of oneness with humanity, the world, and life (Van Cappellen et al., 2012).

## **2.5 Facilitators of Awe**

Current literature based on experimental studies suggest that awe may be elicited by grand and novel stimuli that are beyond a person's comprehension (Keltner & Haidt, 2003; Shiota et al., 2007). However, Weger and Wagemann (2018) suggest that it is not the vastness or the qualities of the phenomenon that inspire awe, but rather it is the individual's framing of the experience that gives it significance. Hence, a grain of sand

could just be as awe-inspiring as the Niagara Falls, depending on how the individual perceives it.

How one experiences awe, and the degree of intensity may be facilitated by one's capacity to be fully attentive to the world and to be absorbed. It was found that individuals who scored high on trait absorption reported experiencing more awe than those who scored low (Van Elk et al., 2016). In addition, people who are more prone to experiencing awe may have a lower need for cognitive closure and a greater tolerance for uncertainty (Shiota et al., 2007), and have greater openness to experiences (Pilgrim et al., 2017; Silvia et al., 2015). These studies support the notion that awe may be experienced more frequently if one is in the frame of mind. As Weger and Wagemann (2018, p.2) suggest, "the issue of awe is not only a question of what the phenomenon has to offer to the beholder; but what the beholder has to offer to the phenomenon."

Schneider (2009) suggests ways of seeing that can prime oneself for awe experiences. He acknowledges that there is no formula or guarantee, but that the following 'lenses' may open oneself up to experiencing awe:

- I. Transience - This involves being aware of the passing of time and life, including that of our own mortality.
- II. Unknowing - Unknowing extends to all dimensions of existence such as time, space, mind, and heart. It helps one to transcend fixation and to appreciate mystery, stimulating one to rise from complacency.

- III. Surprise - This is related to unknowing and is less about seeking novelty than it is about recognizing that newness is ever- present and available. Being ready for surprises means being open to the possibilities that are greater than imagined.
- IV. Vastness - Schneider refers to the grandeur of life and its possibilities, which includes but is not limited to physical immensity. He also proposes that vastness is always in the background of our awareness, “both haunting and exhilarating us” (Schneider, 2009, p.164)
- V. Intricacy - This refers to being appreciative of the complexities and delving into the subtleties and depth of things, going beyond the surface to investigate the world around us more closely.
- VI. Sentiment - Allowing emotions to profoundly move us is key to being able to experience awe.
- VII. Solitude - According to Schneider, solitude is essential to experiencing awe and is also a prerequisite for other lenses described above. Solitude does not only refer to a state of aloneness but also means being attentive, absorbed, and alive.

The above ‘lenses’ as suggested by Schneider are largely a matter of how one’s state of mind and being is which can be changeable and determined by choice. For example, one can choose to be in solitude or to develop a keener eye for observing details in the environment. This suggests that there is scope for one to consciously cultivate ways of seeing and approaches to living to be more attuned to awe experiences. There are also some commonalities that are shared with facilitators of related experiences such as Maslow’s peak experiences (1964). For example, Maslow

believes that an overly rationalistic attitude hinders peak experiences as one may be defending against being flooded by emotions, which resonates with Schneider's lens of sentiment that encourages the capacity to feel and be moved by emotions.

## **2.6 Theoretical perspectives on the experience of awe**

### Awe as a gateway to an expanded consciousness

Thus far, the impact of awe on self-concept and connectedness has been discussed in the light of various research studies which seek to understand how awe leads to increased tendencies towards prosocial behaviours. The current understanding of self-concept and connectedness will be further illuminated through a discussion of various perspectives from the fields of theology, philosophy, and psychology.

Keltner and Haidt (2003) proposed a model of awe that consists of two key elements- 'perceived vastness' and a 'need for accommodation. Perceived vastness may come from observing something large whether literally and physically (e.g. a mountain range) or more conceptually and figuratively (e.g. a charismatic leader). The need for accommodation refers to the cognitive need to adjust our ways of seeing the world when the phenomena that is experienced exceeds or violates our current ways of understanding. Sundararajan (2002), in her critique of the model, proposes an expanded model which includes self-reflexivity as a critical element in the experience of awe. She describes self-reflexivity not in terms of psychological mindedness but as the ability and willingness to be absorbed in the impressions and emotions of the

experience. Rather than fight or flee from the potentially unnerving vastness, one becomes absorbed in it and the experience of being overwhelmed by vastness is accommodated, resulting in an experience of awe rather than trauma. In relation to Existential thought, this may be seen as a form of desedimentation (Spinelli, 2007) of mental structures that enables one to open up to new perceptions and worldviews. Sundararajan's views are informed by negative theology, a way of thinking that negates references to God and suspends the human impulse to put experiences into words and categories, thereby placing the experiencer in a state of cognitive unknowingness. Hence, the ability to withstand the anxieties of being in a state of unknowing may be a factor in determining whether or not one experiences awe. This suspended state of being with the unknown is also captured by Schneider's (2009) description of awe-based consciousness, which involves a sense of veneration, wonder, and adventure with regards to the mystery of existence.

The expanded awareness and recognition of vastness, or a larger whole is a common account in the experience of awe. In addition to the discussion of a broadening self-concept (Perlin & Li, 2020) that involves seeing other people, nature, or the whole universe as part of the self, Wilber (1979) offers another perspective in his book 'No Boundary'. He draws upon Buddhist and Vedanta philosophies to describe the state of awareness that reality does not actually have boundaries, referring to this as 'unity consciousness'. One who has a state of consciousness recognises that the boundary between the self and the other is illusory. Wilber's point differs from the 'self-annihilation' or 'loss of self' that Sundararajan (2002) refers to. While the latter suggests

a sense of losing oneself to another, the former suggests a seeing through of illusion, akin to grasping truth that is common to religious and mystical experiences.

Schneider (2017) advocacy for the development of an awe-based consciousness appears to relate to Wilber's proposition of psycho-spiritual development. It veers away from seeking awe as a momentary experience and instead encourages the development of awe as an attitude towards living such that everyday existence may be imbued with awe, enabling one to live with richness and aliveness. He states that 'awe is neither a paralysing jolt nor a "feel good" boost but a profound and complex attitude.' (Schneider, 2009, pp.xi), and encourages people to see awe as a way of living beyond the immediate direct experience of the emotion. Although quantitative studies tend to focus on dictated experiences of short-term awe that Schneider is less interested in, studies by Sturm et al. (2022) seem to offer a glimpse of possibility that these acute moments of awe may develop into something more sustained. They conducted an 8-week study with 52 older adults between the ages of 60 and 90 on the effects of taking awe-walks. Compared to the control walk group, participants in the weekly awe-walk group that were primed for the experience with prompts reported greater increases in feelings of being connected and part of something larger than themselves. Contrary to many previous studies of awe that relied on controlled inductions of awe or pre-defined settings in nature, this study encouraged participants to look for it in their own environments, in a locale of their choice, and to walk alone. Though the study was brief, and the walks lasted only 15-minutes each time, the findings show potential for awe to



be experienced and possibly sustained through activities that are accessible in daily living.

### Awe as a Leap of Faith

Awe may also play a role in a person's existential development. Kierkegaard (2005) describes three stages of existence that a person may go through in their development. In the aesthetic stage, one relates mainly to oneself and lives for pleasure, beauty, and satisfaction of the senses. In the ethical stage, the individual relates to the needs and wants of others and performs one's duties and responsibilities towards one's social groups. The leap of faith occurs when one transcends the push and pull of the aesthetic and the ethical to the ethical-religious stage, where faith enables one to live authentically with passion and commitment to life choices that transcends the desires and demands of self and society. While Kierkegaard, a devout Christian, sees this as faith in God above all else, in a non-religious context this could also be a commitment to one's values and living truth (Van Deurzen, 2009) Although Kierkegaard made no specific mention of awe, Velichkov (2019) proposes that the leap of faith can be seen as an experience of the sublime that holds intrinsic value, in addition to serving the purpose of personal growth of the individual. He writes that the elevating experience of the sublime is not only emotionally ecstatic, but also involves knowing a kind of truth that is comparable to having an expanded understanding of reality. His analysis draws the parallel between the marriage of ecstasy and truth to Kierkegaard's idea of faith, where truth is attained through great passion that surpasses the need for rationality. A

key distinction that Velichkov highlights between leap of faith and the sublime is that the former can be purely elicited internally, through self-reflexivity, much like Schneider's (2017) take on the "slow simmer" form of awe that comes from hard-won struggles with life's dilemmas. Another interesting point of Velichkov's discussion is that he points out how the leap of faith, just as in sublime and awe-filled experiences, involves grappling with paradoxical and opposing forces- terror and passion, and certainty amidst infinite possibilities. Thus, the richness of the leap of faith in and of itself enhances one's life, without which life might 'become impoverished' (Velichkov, 2019, p.6).

In the context of learning about awe and its impact on one's engagement and connection with the world, the concept of leap of faith opens up a perspective where awe, as a paradoxical and rich experience, could propel one towards making commitments and decisions that may seemingly contradict rationality. The desire and intent to be actively engaged for the benefit of the greater whole may require a simultaneous recognition of both possibilities and limitations, and the will to act is inspired by a passionate commitment to one's truth rather than a satisfaction of self-interests (i.e. aesthetic stage) or duty to others (i.e. ethical stage). An example that comes to mind is that of political and environmental activists working against the odds and taking on grave risks to the self. Such manner of living may be what Schneider (2015) refers to as being the paradoxical self that can find "ground within the groundless". The leap of faith enables one to discover the ability to transcend paradoxes of human nature to becoming an authentic individual (Van Deurzen, 2009).

## 2.7 Summary

Based on the literature that has been reviewed, it appears that the knowledge of awe has taken the form of theories as well as experimental psychology. Although this is helpful in understanding awe as a concept and its effects on people, there is a need to explore and delve in greater depth how lived experiences of awe may look and feel like, and how people make sense of their experiences in their own individual lives. This study aims to discover knowledge that can hopefully contribute to the gap between theoretical and experimental knowledge produced in controlled settings. By putting into foreground the experiences and voices of people who have encountered awe organically, this research also aims to allow depth and complexity of experiences to be captured and contextualised against current theoretical ideas of awe.

In addition, with the exception of work by Schneider who is an existential-humanistic psychotherapist, there appears to be a gap in original research about the experiences of awe. Schneider's contributions tend towards theoretical understanding, and his book 'Awakening to Awe' (2009) which is a series of interviews with peers and acquaintances have made a contribution to qualitative understanding, though it is not research and has a particular focus on how awe has played a role in the interviewees' healing from major life challenges rather than the phenomenological exploration of how awe was experienced. The book also seems to highlight and promote awe as a potent catalyst of personal transformation. In contrast, with this study, I hope to add knowledge that may be useful to the practice of psychotherapy, and as a researcher I am taking on a more critical and evaluative lens than that of an author.

## 2.8 Reflexive Exploration

When I first delved into the literature on awe, I found myself being captivated and absorbed, as if I was thirsty for knowledge, and reading academic theories and papers felt satisfying and joyful as I was actively engaging with the material, highlighting my doubts and questions and making notes on what I thought was interesting and curious. As time went by, the initial openness transformed into something a little more anxiety inducing as I started to simultaneously wonder if I was getting lost, or on the contrary if I was being too narrow in my search. I accepted this uncertainty for what it was for a little longer and tried to remain open to what was available. With time, certain threads began to form, especially in the area of quantitative research studies as I began to identify and recognize names of researchers and the related work that they were in turn referencing. As I began to trace some of this knowledge back to earlier sources, it dawned on me that this research project, while attempting to set itself apart, is a part of a larger whole, inseparable from existing knowledge and yet hopefully contributes unique perspectives. I related this to what I had read about awe- where one feels oneness and being part of something larger, and in moments when I contemplated and allowed this realisation to sink in, I felt an opening in my chest and a sense of solidarity with researchers and academics with whom I have never met, that even though this seemed like such an isolating academic project which is my task to bear, there have been other voyagers such as myself, and while my journey may be relatively small in scale, it was no less important. There was some feeling of comfort and encouragement in that knowledge.

The constant reading on awe and related phenomena such as peak experiences and the sublime had also created in me a kind of yearning to experience awe again.

Coincidentally, my first foray into reading about awe occurred at a time when I was attuned to spiritual knowledge and practices, which seemed to complement and even facilitate my learnings about awe. In contrast, when I revisited the process of reviewing literature at a much later time in the research project, I was preoccupied and stressed, and I noticed the difference in how much I could connect with the material. At the same time, my beginners' mindset of openness had also shifted to being more critical and evaluative of what I was reading, which I made peace with as a necessary step in the evolution of this project.

As a psychotherapist, I was also somewhat baffled by the lack of attention awe has been given in the teaching and learning of the practice. It seems that the understanding of the human experience, which is what many schools of therapy espouse, has still been limited to experiences of struggle and difficulty, which is needless to say important and yet how can we really understand the human experience if we do not also seek to understand experiences such as awe, which has the potential to affect our relationship with ourselves and the world around us.

### **3. Research Methodology**

This chapter aims to clarify the thought processes and decisions behind the chosen research methodology. I will discuss the epistemological stance and research paradigm of this study to illustrate the rationale behind choosing Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. I will also discuss this with reference to other approaches that have been considered, taking into account the possibilities and limitations that various approaches offer in relation to the research needs and objectives. Lastly, I will examine my role as a researcher with a reflexive exploration of how my own experiences may play a role in the research process.

#### **3.1 Qualitative Research**

The research study seeks to explore and understand the subjective experiences of awe and connectedness. Qualitative research was chosen as an appropriate way to uncover the ways in which individuals experience awe and connectedness, and how they make sense of their experiences. Denzin and Lincoln (2018) describe that qualitative research studies phenomena in their natural settings, attempts to make sense of phenomena in terms of the meanings that people give to them while Langdrige (2007) proposes that qualitative methods are concerned with the naturalistic description and interpretation of phenomena.

Unlike quantitative research that observes and measures and assumed objective reality (Creswell, 2014), qualitative research enquires about quality and texture of the human

experience (Willig, 2012a) with the acknowledgement of the subjectivity of the researcher, who plays an active rather than passive role in understanding and interpreting meanings and insights gleaned from the data. There have been many quantitative research studies on awe where responses are measured and tested against hypotheses. This research project aims to give voice and make visible the lived experiences of awe and connectedness,- allowing insight to be developed from naturalistic descriptions and interpretations.

### **3.2 Epistemological Position of Qualitative Research**

Qualitative research is a broad category encompassing a wide spectrum of approaches. Epistemology is the philosophical foundation which underpins the type of knowledge that is sought in the research project. Willig (2012a, p.10) points out that the paradoxical nature of research that on one hand seems to be about findings answers through a systematic process, and yet the starting point is for the researcher to acknowledge their own epistemological position and to ask themselves “what and how can we know?”

Willig (2012a) also defines three broad types of knowledge- realist; phenomenological; and social constructivist:

Realist knowledge aims to capture and reflect as truthfully as possible what is happening in the real world, independent of the researchers and the research

participants' views and knowledge. Social processes and psychological mechanisms are examples of research studies that can adopt a realist stance.

Phenomenological knowledge refers to the subjective experiences of research participants without making any claims that the experiences are accurate as the research aims to understand experience as much as possible from the participants' perspectives. The researcher is interested in the experiential world of the participant rather than the external validity of the account.

Social constructivist knowledge aims to understand how people talk about the world and how reality is constructed through their use of language. The researcher pays particular attention to the ways in which social reality is constructed through discourse, more than what is going on (e.g. realist) or how a phenomenon is experienced by people (e.g. phenomenological).

This research project is interested in participants' experience of awe, how they would describe their psychological, physical, or emotional experiences and how they are impacted by them. The experiential world is of interest here, more so than ascertaining the processes and mechanisms that occur with awe or analysing the way that awe is discussed. Phenomenological knowledge is thus the broad category in which this project is situated. However, within the scope of phenomenological research also lies differences in which phenomenology is studied and presented. Descriptive phenomenology, for example, aims to capture experience as it presents itself and



assumes that there is an essence in the phenomenon that can be described as it is without any addition or subtraction by the perceiver (Giorgi, 2012), and that this can be done through techniques such as bracketing (Lopez & Willis, 2004) where the perceiver is conscious of their own preconceptions and ideas that they be projecting onto the phenomenon. On the other hand, interpretative phenomenology goes beyond the data to also reflect on it in the context of wider social, cultural, or psychological meanings. The description is understood through the lens of the researcher who gives meaning to the account and thus is implicated in the sense-making process. Unlike in descriptive phenomenology, interpretative phenomenological research takes the position that it is not possible to produce a pure description of experience as any description is bound to involve a certain amount of interpretation. Heidegger believes that no observation or description can be exempt from the observers' experiences, presuppositions, and prejudices (Moran, 2000), and that by trying to understand phenomenon, a hermeneutic circle is involved where there is an ongoing, attentive, circular movement between part and whole as understanding becomes more complete (Suddick et al., 2020). To understand parts of an experience, one needs to have sight of the whole, and simultaneously the whole can only be understood through its parts. The researcher may also draw on their own sense of what the participant is saying to uncover meanings that the participant may not be cognizant of.

In this study, I recognize that awe and connectedness may be experiences that are challenging to put in words, and there may be non-verbal cues that will be inevitably interpreted through my own understanding. Although I endeavour to fully step into the

experiential world of the participants, I can only do so with my own perceptions and understandings of what I see and experience. I will further elaborate on why Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis is the appropriate approach given the interests of this study.

### **3.3 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis**

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis as developed by Jonathan Smith is a method that enables researchers to study how individuals make sense and ascribe personal meaning to their experiences. Theoretically, IPA is based upon phenomenology, hermeneutic, and is idiographic in its approach (Smith, 2015). The phenomenological underpinning of IPA means that its focus is on the description of phenomena as it emerges without imposition of theory or presupposed categories of knowledge. Simultaneously, it is hermeneutic in the sense that all phenomena are perceived and interpreted, not only by the researcher but also by the participants. This is referred to as 'double hermeneutics' in IPA and the epistemological stance of interpretivism means that findings are discovered through the lens of both the participant and the researcher. The idiographic, another key feature of IPA, commits to understanding individual perspectives and obtaining rich data, including non-verbal data as well. The emphasis is placed on the particular rather than the universal (Smith, Harré, & Van Langenhove, 1995), which encourages richness and depth of understanding a person's lived experiences rather than formulating overarching theories or explanations. As a phenomenological method, IPA advocates for openness in each participant's interview

so that the phenomenon is revealed, thus allowing the researcher to capture otherwise unexpected or novel characteristics of an experience without a fixed goal. Although the idiographic approach is one of IPA's key features, it does not mean that the analysis stops at the level of the individual. Rather, the specifics of the individual case help to shine a light on a particular dimension of a shared commonality (Shinebourne, 2011), thus highlighting the collective resonance between each individual's experiences.

Ontologically, IPA adopts a relativist position (Willig, 2012a) and is interested in how different people experience realities in their unique ways through various lenses. However, it steers away from being postmodernist as it acknowledges that peoples' realities are shaped by their interactions with social structures and are not completely free-floating and random. It is less interested in studying factual reality, and more interested in investigating human interpretations and sense-making of reality (Danermark et al., 2002). In research, this also means that the words of participants do tell us about their private thoughts and feelings.

With its commitment to obtaining rich and detailed descriptions of experiences, IPA is a useful method for understanding novel phenomena and for in-depth studies into how people make sense of their lived experiences. Although themes and characteristics of experiences are drawn from the data, the focus is on understanding the phenomenon and not about constructing a theory that explains it. A study on awe that uses IPA conducted by Bonner and Friedman (2011) aimed to provide clarity on the concept of awe. However, the researchers had used secondary data instead of conducting their

own interviews. They had an IPA analysis based on the interviews in Schneider's (2009) book 'Awakening to Awe' in which he had interviewed his friends and acquaintances. As such, this was not strictly an original piece of research since the source data was not collected by the researchers nor was it obtained for the purpose of IPA. It is hoped that by using IPA in this study, I will be able to contribute knowledge that is derived from the complex meaning-making processes of myself as the researcher and the participants who have had first-hand experiences.

### **3.4 Limitations of IPA**

One limitation of IPA as a qualitative research methodology lies in the validity of whether the data does represent what is being studied, since the data collected is a subjective experience and the researcher's biases can influence the data collected from the interview itself, and the analysis of the data will also be imbued with the researcher's way of seeing. However, interpretation is an essential and integral part of IPA and the researcher does not seek to completely eliminate themselves from the material, but rather to be mindful of how one is engaging with the worlds of the participants.

Another limitation in IPA is that with its heavy emphasis on interpretations and phenomenological explorations of the individual experience, a major determinant of what emerges will depend on the participants' ability to verbally articulate their thoughts and feelings. Willig (2012b) challenges the ability of language to capture experience,

and questions if participants are able to express themselves adequately. These arguments are even more pertinent in phenomena such as awe that are already seen to be nebulous and difficult to describe. Nevertheless, IPA also acknowledges well the non-verbal and felt sense of the researcher, allowing embodied communication to also be integrated into the researcher's understanding.

In addition, IPA's focus is idiographic, thus prioritising rich descriptions from relatively small sample sizes. In the case of my study that would include 7 participants. The subjective nature of the research also limits the likelihood of replicability and generalizability (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). However, generalizability is not the objective of my research as I am not seeking to formulate broad explanations or theories but am aiming to explore individual experiences in depth and drawing suggestions that will be influenced by my own interpretations.

### **3.5 Alternative Approaches**

In my consideration of other approaches, Constructivist Grounded Theory presented as an alternative. Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) as developed by Charmaz (2008) aims to understand social processes that do not yet have a theory and aims to generate new theory through an abductive approach where the theory is rooted in the data collected. The hallmark of CGT and what makes it different from objectivist Grounded Theory is that its constructivist position acknowledges that reality is a social construction, thus shifting it away from the classical Grounded Theory's positivist

assumption that there is a true nature of reality and introduces interpretive elements. Charmaz (2017) also proposes that CGT can be used to study individual processes and the reciprocal effects between individuals and larger social processes. Although CGT can be adapted to psychological studies, its aim is to ultimately move beyond understanding individual experiences to drawing broader abductive conclusions as to what's, how's, and why's of phenomena. A CGT approach would be more appropriate if I were interested in developing a theory or explanation about the process in which awe influences people's decisions and actions about engaging in their wider community, and if I wanted to explore how private psychological experiences of participants (i.e. awe) to a larger social phenomenon (i.e. volunteering). However, my study was focused on gaining deep insight and understanding into the ways in which individuals experience the phenomenon of awe and connectedness. Thus, the private psychological processes remain the focus of the research. IPA combines empathic hermeneutics and questioning hermeneutics (Smith, 2015), which gives me scope to step into the world of the participant and empathise, while also stepping outside and asking critical questions of the texts that emerge. In addition, when exploring emotions that may be potentially transformative, picking up on non-verbal data such as pauses, facial expressions, or the felt sense in the interview, when combined with rich and detailed descriptions from participants, could provide me with a greater understanding of the phenomenon.

Another alternative that was considered was narrative analysis, which aims to examine the ways in which people construct and communicate stories and how they make meaning of their experiences and the world. It is also idiographic and hermeneutic in its

focus and attends to the lived experiences of the individual and how they understand their world. A core element of narrative analysis is that it is retrospective in nature (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2015), where research participants would look backward from the present moment and reflect on the experiences and events that have formed parts of the larger whole. Although narrative analysis was considered, it seemed more appropriate if the research study was primarily concerned with how people view or make sense of their lives after their experiences of awe. Although this is also a matter of interest, narrative analysis prioritises the stories that are told of the experience, and does not seem to give enough attention to the phenomenon (i.e. 'what is there and what is happening') which the study would like to address.

### **3.6 Reflexive Exploration**

Reflexivity in qualitative research encourages researchers to account for how subjectivity shapes their inquiry and influences the ways in which they understand and evaluate their findings. Subjective perspectives are intertwined with the research process and thus contributes to the construction of meanings (Willig, 2013). Some qualitative researchers propose that subjectivity cannot be erased from the process, and that the purpose of reflexivity is not to simply neutralise, acknowledge, or explain the researcher's influence, but rather to see subjectivity as an asset to actively co-construct data and results (Olmos-Vega et al., 2022). With the use of IPA, the analytical step of identifying and developing emerging themes would be an area in

which researcher's interpretations and understandings come into play. While Smith et al. (2022) talk about the importance of researchers staying true to the participants' voices and not getting carried away into their own interpretations, Goldspink and Engward (2018) propose that researchers attend to the 'echoes' of the data, which they refer to as a 'mixture of the participant's and researcher's words and experiences resonating with each other during the research process' (p.291). Drawing upon the authors' experience of conducting analysis over a period of time interspersed with work and family commitments, they propose that the echoes can occur as thoughts that appear spontaneously over time as they relate and resonate to the participant's experiences. Thus, reflexivity is not necessarily a tick-box activity of making annotations of potential biases during a session of data analysis, but being aware of how one is engaging with the participant's words and experiences over time. Relating this to the double-hermeneutic process in IPA, how I as the researcher make sense of how the participant makes sense of her experience will involve me not just highlighting the more obvious assumptions during the analysis, but also being attentive to what resonates and echoes with me as I go about my day to day, and understanding how my own experiences are influencing the way I interpret the data.

Personal reflexivity requires researchers to reflect on and clarify their expectations, assumptions, and conscious and unconscious reactions to contexts, participants, and data (Walsh, 2003), and Barry et al., (1999) have proposed a number of questions that serve as a helpful guide that can be used continuously throughout the process. Appendix C details my early-stage reflections based on the questions proposed by



Barry et al. (1999) and would be updated throughout the process of research and expressed in the reflexive exploration sub-sections.

Reflecting on my own curiosity and personal interest in the phenomenon of awe and connectedness, I am aware that I have had my personal experience of awe that had been a positive influence on my wellbeing and state of mind. My experience of awe had also brought about feelings of connectedness with the wider world, including people and nature, and was accompanied by feelings of gratitude and a sense of belonging. With this positive experience, I am aware that I may be excited and passionate about the phenomenon, and this may influence the ways in which I interpret the data and may result in me leaning towards giving a positive spin on the findings. On the other hand, my interest also means a greater degree of genuine curiosity of the various experiences that participants have that may be greatly different from my own. I also pay attention to my own emotional processes during the interview, similar to being a therapist, in order to express curiosity and openness without leading the participant with my own stress and excitement. One way in which I have practised being both attuned and grounded was to give myself ten minutes of silence before the first interview to attend to my own thoughts and feelings and to acknowledge them and let them pass. Before my first interview, I noticed feelings of anxiety of the unknown, the concerns of myself fumbling and not getting sufficient description, and excitement to step into the experience of another. I found it helpful to remind myself that I was a novice doing my first interview, and that I could always try again. Owning and

embodying my 'novice-ness' enabled me to step more firmly into the interview with an open and curious mind and heart.

## **4. Method**

This section illustrates the method employed in the research study. I will describe the process of how participants were selected and recruited, how the interview was conducted, as well as how the data was analysed. Ethical considerations will also be discussed as well as a reflexive exploration of my process as a researcher.

### **4.1 Research Design**

The research was carried out utilising the IPA approach (Smith et al., 2022; Smith & Osborn, 2015). The sample was small and purposive with a focus on collecting data that has richness and depth. Semi-structured interviews were conducted virtually through a secure telehealth video-conferencing platform and subsequently transcribed manually and analysed individually before moving on to a collective analysis to identify common group themes. Details will be given in subsequent subsections.

### **4.2 Sample**

For this research project, the sample of interest is adults aged 35-65 years old who have experienced awe with a felt sense of connectedness with the world. The age bracket of 35-65 years is commonly referred to as middle adulthood from the psychosocial point of view (Erikson, 1950). Viewed from the lens of existential life-span development, middle adulthood brings to the foreground the concerns of isolation and death. Becker (2006), in writing about therapy for the middle-aged, highlights one's needs to grapple with isolation on an emotional or ideological identification with the

collective and coming to terms with the limitations of interpersonal intimacy that may have been enjoyed in early adulthood. Jaques (1965) who coined the term 'mid-life crisis', suggests that mid-life begins at around age 35, and that is a time of accepting one's own mortality. However, rather than becoming overwhelmed and losing vitality, he suggests that a healthy transition entails the harnessing of creative impulses in a different way, from the more manic bursts of energy associated with early adulthood to a more sculpted and considered way of engaging with life. The psychosocial lens of Erik Erikson (1950) also intersects with existential concerns as Erikson proposes that a major conflict in middle adulthood is that of generativity versus stagnation. In this stage of life, generativity comes from contributing to the lives of others, be it through parenting or by caring for wider society, and there is a need for one to be included and needed in the lives of others (Slater, 2003). Stagnation, characterised by lethargy and disconnectedness with life, results from not being able to find ways to contribute. The concern of generativity in this phase of life may also mean potential recalibrations in how one chooses to involve oneself with the physical, social, and spiritual dimensions of existence. The age range of 35 to 65 years old is broad and participants may have different ways of experiencing awe or making sense of their experiences. However, taking into account the views of Jaques (1965) and Erikson (1950), it may be appropriate to consider that one begins to grapple with the themes pertinent to middle adulthood from 35 years of age and onwards. The study does not assume that participants across a broad age range will have similar experiences and interpretations of awe, but rather, it is presumed that awe and connectedness may be of relevance to

adults who are beginning or in the midst of dealing with themes of isolation, stagnation, and generativity.

Participants would also need to be able to talk about how awe has impacted them, though the degree of which is of less importance (ie. some awe experiences may be more or less impactful than others). There are no gender or geographical requirements as the study is not gender or country specific, and the research interview would be conducted through an online video conference. In order to obtain rich information, participants needed to show some ability and willingness of participants to be verbally articulate and reflective of their experiences. While awe is a self-transcendent emotion that may be difficult to describe in words, language and specifically the English language is the main medium of translation of this experience, hence participants would have to have some grasp of verbally articulating their experiences for the purpose of the study.

Participants who experienced fear or threat as the main element of their experience of awe will be excluded, as the definition of awe that I refer to sees fear as a possible but non-essential element in awe. Taylor and Uchida (2019) have made helpful comparisons between fear in horror and in awe. Fear in awe is appraised as benign and not actually threatening to one's existence, and more often reflects respect and reverence. On the other hand, fear in horror is related to existential or physical damage. One may feel awe with a manageable level of anxiety when witnessing a volcano eruption from afar, but this may give way to actual horror if one were to be

actually escaping from an eruption and experiences a direct threat to their survival. In the latter case, fear and anxiety may take centre stage and the experience is more traumatic than positive. As such, for the purpose of this study, it is acknowledged that awe may come with unsettling anxiety, but experiences where fear or terror are pronounced features are excluded (e.g. the shock and awe of war or disasters).

In addition, participants who feel awe due to the ingestion of substances (e.g. psychedelics) will also be excluded, as I was interested in awe that was not chemically induced and wanted to capture experiences that occurred in participants' daily lives without an already-altered state of mind.

Participants who have had multiple awe experiences are welcomed to speak of more than one, though the interview would focus on the experiences that were the most memorable for the interviewee.

### **4.3 Recruitment**

The recruitment process was a challenging one. I implemented my plan of reaching out to organisations that serve social, environmental, and spiritual communities. By reaching out to people who are already actively participating in their communities, there may be a higher probability of recruiting people who resonate with the themes of connectedness and engagement in their experiences of awe. I designed a poster (Appendix A) that stated the participation criteria as well as a definition of awe that is

relevant to this research study and in line with current understandings of awe. As described in Section 2.2.1, awe is defined by a sense of wonder, respect, connectedness and being part of something larger than the self

I reached out to organisations that I identified online, at first focusing on Canadian groups before obtaining an approval to remove the limitation of interviewing Canadian participants since the country was irrelevant to the study. The groups that I found were active interest groups listed on social networking sites like Meetup and Facebook, as well as volunteer organisations. In addition, I also posted on the email distribution list of a psychotherapy association. I gained one interested response that was willing and able to be interviewed, and that formed the basis of my pilot study. The process of recruitment yielded helpful insights which I reflected upon and will discuss in the reflexive section. Snowball sampling was utilised and I reached out to research and clinical supervisors as well as peer groups, and I also publicised my research on the provincial psychotherapy association mailing list. I recruited a total of seven participants. Although the initial target was to interview between eight to ten participants, after several rounds of promoting the research study over a few months, I was unable to recruit more than seven participants. While this is short of the intended number of participants, the use of IPA and its idiographic commitment is geared towards delving in depth into individual experiences, thus favouring small samples rather than achieving generalisability through larger sample sizes (Brocki & Wearden, 2006). Moreover, although there are no prescriptive rules as to what the ideal sample size is, there are references to a range from 4-10 for professional doctorate programs

(Clarke, 2010). Seven participants in this study were thus considered sufficient to draw comparisons between participants' experiences and identify group experiential themes.

Prior to the screening call, the consent form and participant information sheet (Appendix E) were sent to each potential participant for their review and to clarify doubts that they had. The screening call provided an opportunity for me to explain the purpose and nature of the research project, as well as to inform potential participants what the actual interview process might look like. Participants were informed that a few questions will be asked in the format of a semi-structured interview and that there would also be a free exploration of what emerges.

The following table provides further details about the participants that were recruited.

*Table 2: Participants and types of awe experiences*

Participant	Types of awe experiences
<b>Pseudonym:</b> Anna <b>Age:</b> 64 <b>Country of Residence:</b> Canada <b>Occupation:</b> Psychotherapist	Anna reflected on awe experiences that happened in relatively large-group settings. She had a particularly memorable experience that happened during a person-centred psychotherapy convention where she felt awe and connectedness amongst the people around her, as well as during a religious event where she felt profound awe and connectedness at a spiritual level. She also reflected on moments of awe during group Taichi classes and events.



	<p>Anna described herself as a spiritual person who actively practices her faith and believes that faith and spirituality is an integral part of being able to experience awe more deeply.</p>
<p><b>Pseudonym:</b> Beatrice</p> <p><b>Age:</b> 38</p> <p><b>Country of Residence:</b> Canada</p> <p><b>Occupation:</b> Psychotherapist</p>	<p>At the time of the interview, Beatrice had very recently experienced awe in a memorial concert organised for a friend that had passed away. The interview thus served as a space for her to reflect and process her experience which was very much fresh in her mind. The feelings and thoughts from the event left an impact on how she saw grief and the interview captured her emerging thoughts and feelings from the recent experience.</p>
<p><b>Pseudonym:</b> Carla</p> <p><b>Age:</b> 60</p> <p><b>Country of Residence:</b> Canada</p> <p><b>Occupation:</b> Retiree (former teacher)</p>	<p>Carla reflected on multiple experiences of awe throughout her life. Travel experiences in her youth opened the gateway to awe, and she has had a wide range of awe experiences ever since. In the interview, she began with an experience that had occurred recently at a cottage that she visits regularly but saw for the very first time what she thought were spiritual guardians of the lake. She subsequently reflected on other experiences of awe, such as the adoption of her daughter which was very significant for her, and how she also finds awe in nature and in her</p>

	<p>everyday surroundings. Carla described herself as someone who is in touch with her spirituality and with the natural world.</p>
<p><b>Pseudonym:</b> Denise</p> <p><b>Age:</b> 36</p> <p><b>Country of Residence:</b> Canada</p> <p><b>Occupation:</b> Psychotherapist</p>	<p>Denise reflected on her experiences of awe in nature as well as in moments when her intuition has lead her to unexpected awe experiences in her day to day living. She is also a practising psychotherapist and makes connections between her experiences and her work with clients. Denise believes in the magic of the world and reflected on her experiences of awe in her everyday life and in the context of being in nature.</p>
<p><b>Pseudonym:</b> Elizabeth</p> <p><b>Age:</b> 42</p> <p><b>Country of Residence:</b> United Kingdom</p> <p><b>Occupation:</b> Did not disclose</p>	<p>Elizabeth reflected on her experiences of awe in intensive meditation retreats and through her committed practice in Buddhist meditation and mindfulness. She experiences awe in daily life and quite frequently, though the experiences are more profound and impactful when she is on a retreat. Rather than seeking novelty and adventure, she relates the states of awe to having a clear mind, which she cultivates through her mindfulness practice.</p>
<p><b>Pseudonym:</b> Fiona</p> <p><b>Age:</b> 58</p> <p><b>Country of Residence:</b> United Kingdom</p>	<p>Fiona recounted a recent experience of awe while watching her daughter's live concert where she had to manage feelings of worry and anxiety for her daughter. She also reflected on a variety of different experiences in</p>

<b>Occupation:</b> Did not disclose	various contexts ranging from being in awe of people to experiencing awe in solitude and in nature. She described herself as being open to unusual experiences and as a dancer she is attuned to her emotions in an embodied way.
<b>Pseudonym:</b> Gloria <b>Age:</b> 57 <b>Country of Residence:</b> Canada <b>Occupation:</b> Psychotherapist	Gloria has had many experiences of awe in a variety of contexts. She focused her reflections on a close encounter with a wild elephant in a safari and her experience of awe and connectedness at a spiritual retreat.

#### 4.4 Data collection and transcription

I developed six questions in line with the areas in which I wanted to focus on (Appendix B). The interview was planned to be 60-75 mins and the questions sought to understand:

(i) participants' experience of the awe and connectedness as it happened (ie. context, thoughts, feelings, sensations, meaning-making)

(ii) the ways in which the experience had influenced their ways of being after the event.

(iii) how they made sense of their experiences, including what they thought were factors that contributed to them having their experiences.

Prompts were prepared to obtain rich description information and to facilitate the participant's recounting and reflective process. The list of questions and prompts also aimed to keep both the participant and me on topic and contained within the boundaries of the subject which may be nebulous and expansive in nature.

Based on my learning with the pilot interview, I noticed that I was particularly mindful of timekeeping as I only had about one hour with the participant and was nervous about losing track with exploration of the phenomenon. Being aware of that, I was able to ease into the following interviews and could engage more deeply with the participants which allowed a more free-flowing conversation that enabled them to reveal and reflect on their memories and emotions that arose spontaneously. During the interviews, I clarified often and checked in with participants to see if I was understanding them correctly. In this process, there was some level of co-creation of meaning that happened during the interviews as using my own language and synonyms meant interpretation had already begun. Smith et al. (2022) advise that researchers resist the temptation to interpret while the interview is ongoing and suggest not going beyond clarifying and confirming understanding with the participants as anything more is analysis that is better left to subsequent stages. My experience of this was that indeed it was a challenge to keep interpretation out of the interview and I could make note of

that to keep myself focused on the participants' worlds. However, there were moments where measured and tentative offerings of interpretations may serve to elicit deeper description from the participant. Furthermore, the interview hour would be the only opportunity where my understanding could be further elaborated on or challenged by the participants themselves, which aids towards better validity of the findings as they better represent the experiences of the participants.

The interviews were audio-recorded with a recording device and transcribed by hand. The transcription process was laborious as it involved multiple pauses and re-listening. However, that allowed me to immerse myself in the interview and to record feelings and thoughts that seemed poignant. I kept in mind the two broad forms of transcription- naturalised and de-naturalized (Nascimento & Steinbruch, 2019), with naturalised transcription leaving the data in its most raw form with its pauses and utterances, and denaturalized being one that has speech interferences and noises interpreted. I leaned towards naturalised transcription as I wanted the transcribed data to be as close as possible to the raw audio recording for analysis, so that I can be more intentional about noting my personal interpretations and to be able to read through the transcription with fresh eyes at a later time. Smith et al. (2022) state that IPA analysis focuses on the content of the participants' account and thus suggest that transcriptions do not need to include all of the non-verbal utterances and length of pauses. Although that may be a valid point where not all non-verbal details need to be included, there are moments in the transcript where some pauses seem to convey information. For example, the experience of awe may not be easy to put in words and participants may grapple with

words, thus pauses may reflect the nature of the phenomenon rather than present as a meaningless gap in time. The decision to include or exclude non-verbal accounts is thus another form of interpretation where I as the researcher play an active role in the capturing of knowledge.

#### **4.5 Data Analysis**

The data was analysed following the guidelines of IPA data analysis offered by Smith et al. (2022).

##### **Step 1: Reading and reading the first case**

The first step of the analysis involved immersing myself in the transcript, at times along with the audio-recording when coming across a particularly dense or rich description. This helps to ensure that I am deliberately slowing down and allowing the participant to become the focus of my analysis.

##### **Step 2: Exploratory noting**

This step involves reading the transcript while freely noting my thoughts, feelings and questions in the adjacent column. Some comments are a close summary or highlight of what the participant is describing, while others may be more interpretative. Interpretative or speculative comments are noted by beginning the sentence with 'I

wonder' or 'it seems' to indicate that these are my subjective opinions. As I became more familiar with the analysis, steps one and two are more merged and I began noting from the first reading. Below is an example of the process of writing exploratory notes:

<p>and the thing was i didnt... <u>I havent had many of those experiences so i was so amazed</u> that when i felt that thing of you were in a group and it was like uh i <u>decided for myself i said you know what, if you want to be a person centered therapist, i had to just be myself. I have just to be myself here right</u>, so i didnt make any efforts to say anything, to do anything. But, i cant remember what i said of course I remember this was like 30 years ago but whatever i said in the group was like when i said something was like <u>i HAD to say something</u>. It was almost like there was this experience that i think it had to be with the group. It was like, when I <u>felt like saying something was</u></p>	<p>Uncommon occurrence.  <u>Amazed</u>. That 'thing' of being in a group.  Again, <u>group</u> seems to be significant.  I was intrigued by 'be myself while at the same time anxious about going out of topic.  How did she relate the experience to 'being herself'?  Cannot remember the content of what she said, but <u>HAD to suggests</u> that she felt compelled to say something.  How did she think that it had to be with the</p>
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Figure 1: Example of writing exploratory notes

### Step 3: Constructing experiential statements

Step three involves consolidating my thoughts and reducing the amount of detail while extracting important features of the exploratory notes. There is less focus on the transcript itself and thus consists of more analytical work. The hermeneutic circle shows itself here as the process looks at more segmented parts of the whole data set and at the same time is understood against the backdrop of the entire interview, with more interpretation on the researcher's end (Smith et al., 2022). The table below shows how experiential statements in the columns on the extreme left are derived from my notes and understanding of what the participant had said as written on the extreme right column.

Reflecting about awe experiences enables her to choose a different narrative of life that is not just about hardships but one made of many moments of awe and spiritual awakening.

681 like these memories especially in prepping  
 682 for this like I may not have lined them all up  
 683 before but I have this you know oh and this  
 684 moment and this moment and this moment  
 685 like uh like uh a string of beautiful gems  
 686 uhm...that is an equally true story to tell as  
 687 the story of all the hard things that I could  
 688 tell that story too. T: Mmmm G: but uh I like  
 689 having a choice about what story I tell  
 690 about my life. you know, I can tell the story  
 691 of all these moments of awe and  
 692 expansiveness and spiritual awakening or  
 693 invitation...uhm...and it's it's a true story,  
 694 you know?  
 695 T: mmmm

despair. Earlier in the interview she mentioned that awe awakens her to see the good and beauty of the world. It sounds like awe plays a role of reminding her that there is more good than bad and I wonder if that helps facilitate a more positive outlook on the world.

In preparing for the interview she notices that she could tell a story of all the awe moments in her life and that would be as valid and true as telling a narrative of all the hard things she has experienced. She likes having a choice about the story wants to tell of her life- there is agency here in choosing to notice and to see life as a series of awe moments. This sounds like a significant influence on life narrative and I wonder how and what are the therapeutic implications of a conscious reflection of awe in life.

*Figure 2: Example of experiential statement derived in Interview G (Gloria)*

#### **Step 4: Looking for connections across experiential statements**

After the development of experiential statements in the whole interview, this step involves grouping or mapping statements that fit together by looking for connections between the statements. Although there is no prescriptive process, I found the guidelines and suggestions by Smith et al. (2022) to be very helpful. I examined the experiential statements on their own and out of the chronological order of the interview so that broader and fresher perspective could be taken. Experiential statements that had conceptual similarities were clustered together. This process was iterative, first beginning with many cluster groups, and later some were integrated. The process of deciding whether or not a particular cluster of statements belonged in its own standalone theme required more careful consideration and occasionally checking with



the actual transcript to understand the specific parts better. For example, the figures below illustrate how the Personal Experiential Statements of 'Embodied' and 'Transcending cognitive understanding' were tentatively drawn out from a group of experiential statements in Interview A.

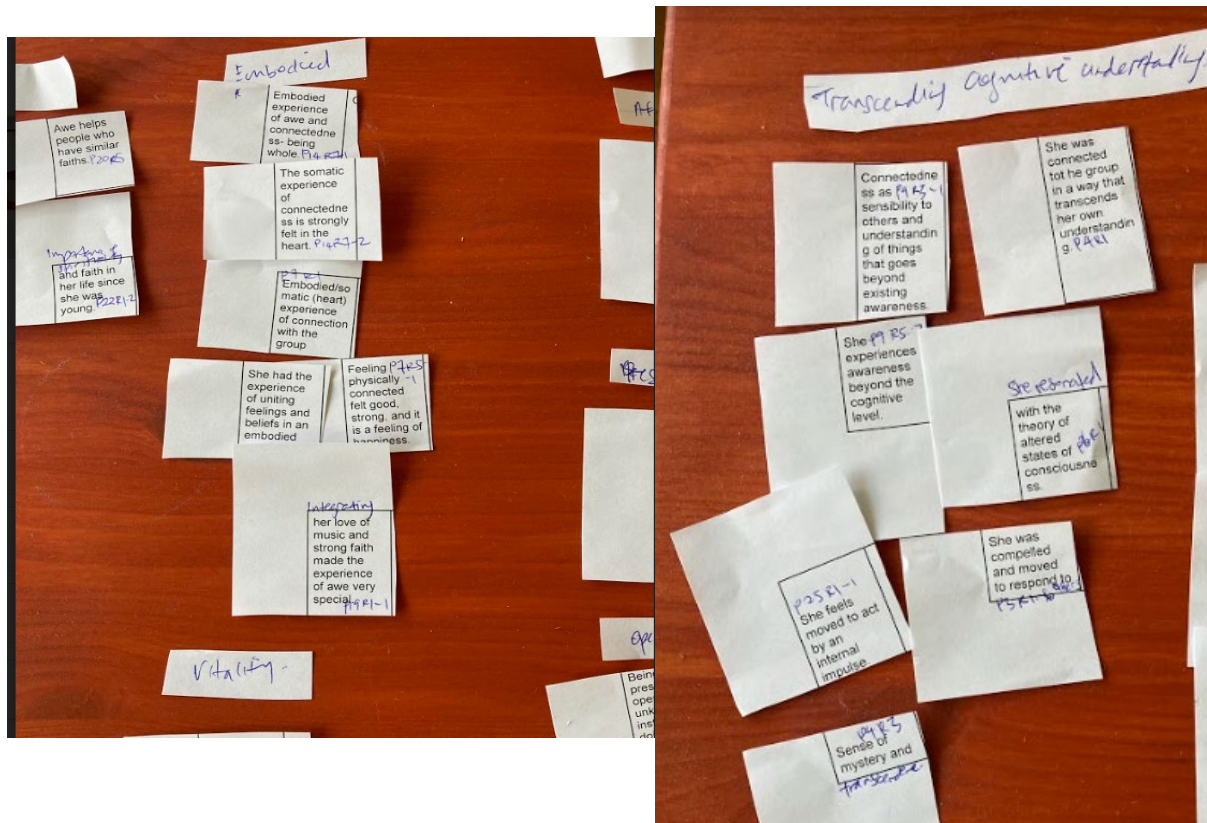


Figure 3: Example of PETs being derived from experiential statements in Interview A.

## Step 5: Naming and consolidating the Personal Experiential Themes (PETs)

At this stage, a table was developed where each cluster of PETs were given names that best described the overarching concept of the cluster. The names were tentatively held as I wanted to remain open to what the larger group analysis would reveal.

The following figure is an example of how the PET and the corresponding verbatims are organised. At this stage, the overarching theme is also tentatively derived (e.g. what helps/hinders awe experiences).

1		PET	Verbatim	Reference
2	What helps/hinders		that really connects that feeling of awe of being, like you have to kind of have enough space in your life I guess to even know to appreciate something	p36,1148
3		Making space and time	I feel like just within yourself you have to have enough wherewithal to kind of appreciate those experiences or be able to distinguish them from what is otherwise like a pretty regular day...	p36,1171
4			so to have to slow down and have like an appreciation for something	p36,1158
5		Being present and noticing	I really do try and make an effort, especially for my own mental health it really seems to make such a huge difference for me to stop and be present and appreciate what's going on around me instead of just like going through the motions and being like "everything's fine" if it isn't	p16,518
6			just really trying to really appreciate those things rather than just rush by and not notice that the experience is even happening.	p14, 455
7			they could be so easily overlooked so that's just a nice feeling to know like that uplifting sense of connection can happen the more that we're kind of aware of ourselves and like the surroundings.	p38,1213

*Figure 4: Organisation of Personal Experiential Themes*

## Step 6: Analysing the other interviews individually

Each case was analysed from the beginning to the end on its own terms, in line with IPA's idiographic focus on the individual experience. Differences can be seen in terms of how much depth and breadth of description each participant provides to certain aspects of their experiences. Sufficient time had lapsed between the analysis of each case, and most of the time an interview was transcribed and analysed fully before moving on to the next interview. This enabled me to stay focused on one participant's world at a time and to minimise the influence that they may have on my understanding.

## **Step 7: Developing Group Experiential Themes across cases**

At this stage, patterns of similarity and differences were identified across PETs where shared and unique features of the experiences amongst participants are highlighted. Each table of PETs was scanned through to look for similarities and differences and the frequency in which the themes appeared was also noted. Smith et al. (2022) consider themes recurrent when they are located in one-third to a half of the interviews. Strong and clear connections between themes began to emerge and I identified four superordinate themes which will be discussed in the next chapter.

## **4.6 Ethical Considerations**

In designing the research, care was taken to ensure that the study was ethical and that risks were identified and managed before they arise. Ethical guidelines from the BACP (Bond, 2004) were taken into consideration and a thorough risk assessment was conducted and submitted to the Ethics Board of Middlesex University and NSPC (Appendix D). Participants were informed both verbally and through a research information sheet about their rights to withdraw their consent from the study up to two weeks after the interview and were also made aware that the interview was audio-recorded, and that the data was anonymised through the use of pseudonyms of identifiable information. The screening call provided an opportunity to clarify any doubts that they had about the consent form and information about the research, and they were also welcomed to ask questions by email. Bond (2004) advises that the relationship between researcher and participant should be a primary focus for ethical

consideration throughout all stages of a research project. I found this to be relevant even during the process of screening potential participants. In one instance, when I emphasised the confidentiality of the research during a screening call and that identifiable elements would be anonymised, a potential participant expressed that she felt assured that she could speak freely without censoring herself. This is significant as it sets up the right frame for participants to freely express and explore their thoughts and feelings within the interview.

In the process of recruitment and leading up to the interview, participating in the Research Project 1 module was also a good platform where peers could share their experiences and to exchange guidance and get advice from the tutor about potential ethical concerns such as the crossing of boundaries outside the framework of research (e.g. coming across a participant at an event). This was done with care and consideration of participants' anonymity and was useful as some peers were further ahead in their research progress and could share helpful experiences. In the context of my research project where I am expecting some potential participants to be coming from related psychotherapy or helping professions, there is a chance of crossing paths in future therapy-related workshops or seminars. I am abiding by similar guidelines of maintaining confidentiality between therapist and client where there will be no mention of the participant's involvement in the research.

## 4.7 Reflexive Exploration

In this process, I was acutely aware of the difference in roles that I was undertaking both as a therapist and researcher (Gee, 2018). As a therapist, I have the relative advantage of time to check back with a client about how I made sense of their experiences and the process of bracketing, horizontalization, and interpretation within the therapeutic relationship that evolves. As a researcher however time is condensed and much of the interpretation happens outside of the interview hour, although there is some level of co-creating and joint interpretation with participants when I clarify their experiences. I noticed that my interpretation and hence words and phrases that I use to describe themes and sub-themes are influenced by my experience and vocabulary as a therapist. For example, words such as ‘embodied’, ‘transcending’, and ‘empathy’ come ready-at-hand in a Heideggerian sense, though when I try to step away from familiar therapeutic or psychological words, I find myself returning to them as they do land appropriately and with integrity.

I also noted with every interview I would feel very absorbed and be moved by the participants’ experiences of awe, especially when they seem emotionally connected to the moments and are expressive in their words and body language. There had been moments where it seemed like I was feeling awe with them, as if awe was contagious and in allowing myself to be absorbed and present, I felt very connected to the participants and to the project. As a researcher, I chose this subject of interest as I found this personally meaningful, yet the academic process of research has often felt daunting and tedious, and I would sometimes lose my sense of enthusiasm despite still

being able to see meaning in what I was doing. Thankfully, every interview had felt like a nourishing boost of spirit that revitalised me. I suppose this may be what Schneider (2011) meant about awe bringing thrill that uplifts and connects one to something larger than oneself. I would often end the interviews feeling gratitude for the participants' wholehearted commitment and for their generosity, and this seemed to be a mutual feeling as participants expressed that it felt good talking and reliving their awe experiences. There was a sense of wanting to carry the project through to the best of my ability to do justice to the time and energy that the participants and myself have committed to the study, despite the tiredness.

The process of data analysis felt like an exciting journey of uncovering each participant's world with little expectation. Moving from analysing the cases individually to searching for group themes, I was first nervous about how expansive the information had become and noted feelings of relief when I began to see the connections between cases and gradually felt that things could take more shape and form. There were times when I felt almost attached to the information that did not seem to fit in anywhere, reluctant to let them go, and upon reflection thought that it was related to my sense of not wanting anything to go to waste, as if every bit of information is precious, and being cautious- what if I missed anything out. Putting on a more rational researcher's hat and also trusting myself that I do tend to have a good memory and sense of what is impactful, I could once again ground myself in the objectives of the research and to be more discerning in what I included.

## 5. Findings

In this chapter, I present the findings of the analysis which yielded four Group Experiential Themes (GET):

### **I. The immediate experience of awe- Challenging, Comforting and Connecting.**

This theme explores what is experienced by participants in the immediate moments of awe as the phenomena unfold. This includes physical, psychological, and emotional states and how the participants made sense of the experiences.

### **II. The impact of awe- expanded hearts, expanded minds.**

The enduring impact of awe is explored here as participants discuss the influence of their awe experiences on their lives beyond the immediate moment.

### **III. The psychological facilitators of awe**

Participants discuss the psychological conditions that help them to experience awe.

#### **IV. The conceptualisation of awe**

This theme explores more broadly what participants think about awe in addition to their personal experiences. In this part, I also describe and integrate the ideas that have been explored in the other themes.

##### **5.1 Group Experiential Theme I: The immediate experience of awe- Challenging, Comforting, and Connecting**

Participants were asked to describe their experiences of awe and further prompted with questions such as their feelings, thoughts, or physical sensations during the moments in which the phenomena were unfolding. Although the actual events or context of awe may be different, there seemed to be some defining characteristics and elements. As I further examined these characteristics, I noticed that they can be broadly grouped into three categories- (i) challenging perceptions, (ii) comforting feelings and (iii) connectedness between self and other. This is illustrated by the following diagram:



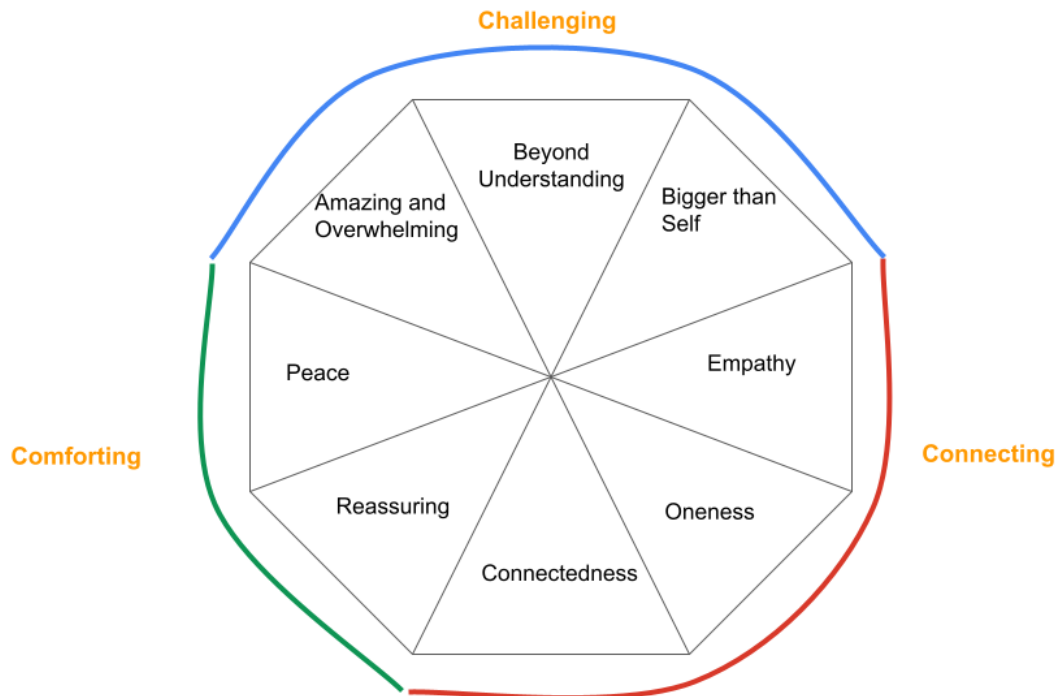


Figure 5: Group Experiential Theme I: The Immediate Experience of Awe

#### Theme I-1: Challenging perceptions

##### **Amazing and Overwhelming**

When describing their experiences, six out of seven participants were amazed by the phenomena that they were witnessing. Some participants were amazed by the abilities of the other, whether it was the resilience of nature or the skills of other people. Carla and Denise both expressed amazement at how nature continues to survive despite hardships, and there is a sense of them being impressed:

*“...how do they even make it you know like so it’s just incredible to me...how does it just grow there and survive like things like that are just amazing to me that seeing it exists in the first place.” (Denise: 383)*

*“The other part of awe for me is also resilience when I look at nature particularly because I’m always amazed at how resilient nature is even with all the destruction that humans are doing to it.” (Carla: 1506)*

Fiona attended a concert in which her daughter was part of the band. The band had very limited opportunities to practice together beforehand and she was in awe of their ability to listen to one another. Gloria on the other hand was amazed by the monk’s ability to transmit a sense of presence in a large meditation hall. Similar to Denise and Carla, there is a sense of amazement at how something could be achieved and overcome.

*“I was awestruck actually by how they all as a band listened to each other and it just worked. And I was sort of so amazed...” (Fiona: 78)*

*“...somehow he could bring that presence on a tangible felt level that I at the back of the room could still know, taste it a little bit, that’s amazing.” (Gloria: 448)*

The participants’ amazement was also related to how extraordinary and unusual the experience was. For example, Gloria’s unexpected physical closeness with a wild elephant left her astonished, and Elizabeth was amazed by her own sense of the wonder and newness even amidst familiar objects in the environment:

*“...in that moment together being like gobsmacked like “Oh my god!” But also like (gasps) you can't be closer to an elephant in the wild you know like you just like this moment of amazement really.” (Gloria: 109)*

*“...it's just I have never seen them like that before and how amazing they are but that sort of doesn't really describe the feeling just to say “oh so amazing” (laugh) it doesn't really capture actually how it feels...” (Elizabeth: 102)*

Closely related to the amazement was the feeling of awe being an overwhelming experience as described by three participants. Beatrice's interview took place shortly after her participation in a memorial concert and she was still in the midst of making sense of the experience:

*“...overwhelming feeling that I am still kind of processing” (Beatrice: 13).*

Anna describes a flood of positive emotion:

*“I felt almost like flooded by this emotion, really good emotion, a good sense of awe (laughs)” (Anna: 89).*

Carla was “overwhelmed with the intensity of it” (Carla: 21) and also “overwhelmed by gratitude” (Carla: 579). While amazement seemed to carry a tone of disbelief where

participants were left mentally grappling with what they had experienced, the experience of being overwhelmed seemed to be more of a feeling state.

### **Beyond understanding**

Four participants had experiences of awe that went beyond their current understanding of the world. There is acknowledgement of the limitations of what one knows and a sense of coming into contact with the unknown and its possibilities. In the face of something that is beyond their understanding, participants had different responses. Anna's experience of awe in a large group enabled her to connect with the group in a way that transcended her understanding, and she compared that to being in an altered state of consciousness:

*"...in a way that it goes beyond just what we can think and understand."*

*(Anna: 78)*

Denise encounters the complexity of facing multiple possibilities but seemed to leave it as that:

*"oh my gosh you don't know what's out there and it could be so many possibilities right like just standing and looking at the stars really does that for me because there's some complexity to it." (Denise: 70)*

Gloria did not think that it was possible to be in such an intimate encounter with a wild elephant, and seemed to revel in the amazement of it:

*“...how is this moment possible, you know?... it’s not like I haven’t been on a safari before and it’s amazing but that, THAT degree of intimacy? unexpected intimacy?” (Gloria: 117)*

Meanwhile, Clara’s experience of adoption went so far beyond her understanding of what was possible that she felt compelled to believe in something larger than herself and in pre-destiny.

*“...Oh My God how can that little girl who’s only known me for four days...she wanted me over that caregiver who she knows...that was an awe moment for me because I was like okay God I get it, I get it Universe, I was meant to be her mom.” (Clara: 481)*

## **Bigger than self**

Five participants had the experience of awe where they felt that there was something bigger than themselves. Carla was in such disbelief about how her newly adopted daughter could have chosen to go to her as a stranger over a known caregiver that she related it to a bigger entity that has pre-determined the event. For Carla, the sense of

something 'bigger than self' seemed like a meaning-making that may have happened in the moment of awe.

*"...did the Universe not allow me to give birth to a child because this child was going to need a home? Because this country was telling this woman that she couldn't have two children at this moment? See (emotional) what I mean...that's why I have to believe in something bigger than myself because it... it's unfathomable." (Clara: 626)*

For other participants such as Denise, awe is a "very magical and uplifting and incredible" experience (Denise: 893) and being open to awe allows her to feel part of something bigger than herself:

*"I keep using the word expanded but it feels like you know you can be a part of something bigger than yourself if you are open to experiencing things like awe," (Denise: 251)*

Gloria echoed a similar sentiment of awe being an expansive and embodied experience:

*"...lifted out of a tight, small personalised experience into something bigger than oneself" (Gloria: 161)*

*“...awe as a feeling that is quite expansive...this combination of very heart-centred opening but also mind...that’s quite an embodied one.”*

(Gloria: 8).

The feeling of being undoubtedly part of something bigger than herself makes the experience very impactful and memorable:

*“...that’s in part why it imprints so deeply... you get a tiny little moment of unquestionably a part of something bigger than yourself.” (Gloria: 250)*

For Elizabeth and Fiona, the experience of vastness that is felt in awe is related to the smallness of themselves or their daily experiences. Elizabeth is put in touch with *“...much more and bigger than our sort of very small problems”* (Elizabeth: 371). On the other hand, Fiona’s awe of others’ abilities and feeling of being potentially “disabled” is a contrast to the other participants’ experiences that were uplifting and expansive:

*“...which can make an individual feel small but also potentially feel uhm uh...disabled because one can’t do something” (Fiona: 7)*

## Theme I- 2: Comforting feelings

### **Reassuring**

Three participants described feelings of reassurance in their experiences of awe, whether it was of their own selves such as Denise or a reassurance of the wellbeing of the greater world. Both Carla and Elizabeth shared a sense that the planet will continue to exist. Carla felt that people and the planet will be alright despite the apparent chaos of the world, while Elizabeth thought that the planet was intelligent and can survive independent of human existence.

*“I felt like... everything is going to be okay...the world is falling apart in many ways like you know just all the craziness of the world today and you’re okay and we are going to be okay...the planet was going to be okay.” (Carla: 115)*

*“I think and also knowing oh I think everything is going to be okay...not in relation to me or anything...I think this planet is going to be okay whether that includes our species continuing or not or continuing on a smaller scale...the actual planet seems I don’t know just clever, just it’s got an intelligence and a beauty that you know we don’t see an uhm it will save itself no matter...” (Elizabeth: 396)*



Denise's experience was of reassurance of herself, as she sees her awe experiences as signposts that she was correctly situated in space and time:

*"...a little poke from the universe to just be like hey you're on the right path... you're in the right place at the right time that kind of thing it just had that sense of being where I was supposed to be at the moment in time..." (Denise: 854)*

## **Peace**

Five participants described feelings of peace in their awe experiences. Carla takes time to experience awe as she knows that she can feel absolute peace, while Denise described feeling peace and being present in the moment.

*"I think I just love the feeling so much, that I that's why I probably give it the time, because I know for that moment...I'm gonna have true one hundred percent peace..." (Carla: 1435)*

*"I think for me it's very peaceful and calm...like this very present calm feeling like I don't feel like I have to be somewhere else..." (Denise: 124)*

Elizabeth and Gloria shared the sensation of "stillness" that could be felt even amidst other feelings such as amazement and thrill.

*“...there is an internal stillness I feel even when other feelings come along where it’s surprise, joy, or just the thrill of the moment uhm or sometimes even the edge of fear...all those other feelings can exist but in the middle of it, there is that quiet or stillness.” (Gloria: 216)*

*“...it’s more peaceful uhm and uh still- the feeling inside, it’s a feeling of peace and still, but also there’s still...a feeling of amazement and wonder.” (Elizabeth: 49)*

Elizabeth attributed the peace and stillness to not having any desire to control things in moments of awe:

*“There’s a peak lack of wanting to control things during those moments and that’s what brings the peace you’re just sort of letting go...”*  
(Elizabeth: 418)

In addition, not having any comparative and self-referential thoughts also contributed to her feeling stillness:

*“...didn’t have any thoughts about ...making comparisons...uhm there’s no kind of ‘I’ involved in how I saw it...because you haven’t got all of that going on in your mind which creates a feeling of peace and amazement uhm and stillness. Yeah, stillness.” (Elizabeth: 664)*

Fiona's experience of peace was felt in a physical way that seemed simultaneously embodied and disembodied.

*"...it's a very strong sensation and I feel it physically...a real sense of contentment...peace and it's like I have this huge it's like I feel this almost out of body and in body as well but this strange amazing sense of uhm... peace." (Fiona: 737)*

### Theme I-3: Connecting

#### **Connectedness**

All seven participants talked about their experiences of connectedness in experiences of awe. Participants shared that they connected to other people, to the world around them, or to the Universe or God. Four participants felt connected to people in the context of having shared experiences within a large group. Although they had a collective shared experience, participants seemed to be simultaneously aware of their togetherness and separateness from the group.

*"...connectedness... yes...it's that everybody was there really wanting to support her with their own worlds, with their own suchness of what makes them...though their own reasons for you know very different from*

*mine, their own...but they're all in effect all very happy and clapping and that created a sense of awe..." (Fiona: 452)*

*"You feel like you're not yourself alone...you're not separated from the group you can be if you want but you feel like you were one thing moving together."(Anna: 569)*

*"...it's like I felt physically my heart connected with the group or with the person I am with..." (Anna: 130)*

*"... this other 100 humans in this space are all having an experience and being moved, even if they are bored or neutral or shut down like...like the human-ness...yea it was moving to me." (Beatrice: 108)*

Elizabeth's sense of connectedness was also related to understanding that suffering and a desire to be happy are universally shared human experiences:

*"I feel more connected to other people because I have a better understanding...you know there's a, everyone's sort of suffering, everyone wants to be happy..." (Elizabeth: 818)*

Denise also relates to the feeling of being connected to other people through having shared commonalities and being in awe adds an uplifting and energetic element to her feelings of connectedness, particularly in her therapeutic relationships:

*“... the special nature of that relationship really does lend itself to these experiences of awe and feeling that expansiveness between that energetic connection again between every living thing like you can always find commonality and shared experiences it might not have been through the same exact thing ...that same like connection point of awe within myself I think...I feel like it's a very heartfelt connection and so I like feel that like love and expansion and that heart-centred connection when I work with people...” (Denise: 737)*

Gloria's experience of awe seemed to go beyond feeling connected as she distinguished between being connected and being a part of, where the former suggests separateness:

*“...still remaining two distinct parts in which we've created a bridge between us.” (Gloria: 329).*

Instead, what Gloria experienced was more of the dissolution of boundaries between herself and the other:

*“...we have both become a portion of the bigger thing that is happening...so I might veer a little bit away personally from that language of connected because it’s an immersion uh I feel like it’s an immersion and I feel like it’s a dissolution of separate self...” (Gloria: 335).*

Other participants related their sense of connectedness to the world as a contrast to feeling lonely. Carla expresses her amazement of the other and in her relational moment she feels less lonely:

*“I’m just like Oh my God I wanna say to the tree “you’re amazing that you did that!” so I feel a part of it, so there I don’t feel lonely...” (Carla: 1514)*

On the other hand, Elizabeth noted that she felt both connected and lonely. Despite feeling connected in the moment, having few people in her social circle that she can relate her experiences too makes her feel isolated:

*“I do feel more connected even though I’ve also said I feel more isolated and lonely, it’s a bit of a paradox I think...” (Elizabeth: 836)*

Denise pointed out that seeking for support during the experience of awe itself can help mitigate the potentially fear-inducing parts of awe:

*“...sometimes awe is a little bit scary so if you ask for help and you could switch over to the positive side of it when you’re experiencing more of the connectedness and love and like happiness and peace and whatever it is that you want to feel in that experience rather than being stuck.” (Denise: 275)*

## **Oneness**

Four participants referred to the sense of ‘oneness’ in their awe experiences. Anna felt one with the group despite knowing she’s a separate individual:

*“I know I am separate from the other person but it’s almost like the feeling of being one with the group, being one with the person.”*  
*(Anna:158).*

Some participants described feeling at one with the world in natural environments.

Carla shared a desire to want to be one with the ocean and a sense that she was not alone but rather part of the natural world that has a profound history of existence

*“It’s almost like I want to be the ocean like I want to be one with the ocean, it’s kind of like that with the guardians.” (Carla: 328)*

*"I'm not alone, I'm on this planet and I'm part of that ocean or I'm part of that tree...the ocean has been here for eternity." (Carla: 1493)*

Fiona described awe experiences of being alone in nature which are distinct from being in awe with other people present. In nature, she can access peace and wellbeing:

*"I don't see anybody say for an hour or something like that I really do feel that one, there's a sense of I just feel the world is with me... I feel very much in this it's almost spiritual sense of wellbeing." (Fiona: 726)*

Gloria's sense of oneness felt experiential and not merely cognitive. She experiences being part of something much larger than her individual self:

*"...sense of oneness that you're a part of it, it's not that you're knowing about it, it's that you're in it...it feels just purely experiential, not thinking about it..." (Gloria: 256)*

*"...in that moment that separateness of you know myself as a human somehow dissolves a little bit... like joining with something bigger you know the cosmos the universe the world the Earth... there is a bit of dissolution of the individuated self." (Gloria: 242)*



## Empathy-knowing and being known

Anna and Gloria had experiences of knowing and being known by the other in their group experiences despite being strangers. Anna felt deeply connected to another participant in her group experience, and she responded to her so intuitively that there was a high level of resonance with the member and the group as a whole:

*“...and didn’t seem to me to be something so important but when I said I could feel like the group so QUIET.” (Anna: 69)*

She related the ‘knowing’ to empathy that went beyond cognitive knowledge:

*“...VERY deep empathy...able to really REALLY know things about the other person that I know not only in my mind but uh...have an awareness that might not be just cognitive awareness but what you call deep empathy...” (Anna: 187)*

Gloria, on the other hand, had an experience of being known by a monk and spiritual leader during a group meditation session. She described feeling awe at the knowledge that she felt known by him despite having never met and being seated far away:

*“...without any specific distinction about me I unquestionably felt known in that room with him and a part of him, him a part of me somehow...”*

(Gloria: 417)

The feeling of being known was subtle and took time to process, and it was profoundly memorable as Gloria looked visibly moved as she recounted this memory:

*“I knew I could FEEL something but I didn’t articulate it until in the group in the home group and that moment of being like...Oh I actually feel known (sounds amazed) (pause) here... it still lingers like that...that...the awe piece of that for me is the surprise the shock of this transcendent experience in the dissolution of specific self.” (Gloria: 431)*

## 5.2 Group Experiential Theme II: Impact of Awe- expanded hearts, expanded minds



*Figure 6: Group Experiential Theme II: The Impact of Awe*

## Gaining Perspectives

Four participants described gaining new perspectives of the world and life from their experiences of awe. Beatrice's experience of awe during a memorial concert changed the way she saw grief and is more embracing of it being a continuous process that can also include joy. Her previous experiences of grief felt as if they had a prescribed end-time, but her experience at the concert has shown her that grief can be approached with an unapologetic attitude.):

*"I think this experience of the concert and witnessing my friend and the other artist putting it together like -no no there's no end...to uhm...tsk.. grieving for someone celebrating them or remembering them.*  
(Beatrice: 523)

Denise's experience of awe had left her with the perspective that the world could surprise and amaze her, and it was beyond the ordinary:

*"I guess was kind of the message...like wow the world is really magical and...it has the potential to shock and amaze us basically."* (Denise: 815)

Elizabeth found that awe has helped her to get a less self-centred perspective and also to see things from multiple and broader angles:

*“I think those moments of awe and wonder all contribute...realisation that things are much bigger than just you so that enables you to see everything like that or try and see everything like that from a bigger and wider picture from all different angles.” (Elizabeth: 861)*

For Gloria, the perspective she gained from awe experiences are related to her own life-narrative. She described herself as having a history of traumatic experiences and the reflection and sharing of her awe experiences has allowed her to see that she has a choice of seeing her life through the series of awe experiences that is equally as valid as the narrative of hardships. While awe experiences in themselves could offer new perspectives, a broader and deeper reflection may, in the case of Gloria, also lead to seeing one's own life from a different lens.

*“I have this you know oh and this moment and this moment and...like uh a string of beautiful gems uhm...that is an equally true story to tell as the story of all the hard things that I could tell that story too...I like having a choice about what story I tell about my life, you know, I can tell the story*

*of all these moments of awe and expansiveness and spiritual awakening or invitation...uhm...and it's a true story, you know?" (Gloria: 683)*

## **Empathy and Compassion**

Four participants described feeling empathy and compassion for themselves or for people even beyond the immediate experience of awe. Fiona's awe experiences have allowed her to be kinder to herself (Fiona: 833) while Elizabeth experiences alongside her meditation practice has sensitised her to the pain of others so much so that the depiction of violence in a children's book seemed awful to her (Elizabeth: 540)

In Carla's experience of adoption, she was aware of how her opportunity to become a mother came with the loss of another mother. Since then, she has kept her daughter's birth-mother in mind and extends well-wishes to her:

*"...that experience of becoming a mom in that way was a moment of awe because I, I'm always trying to balance, like every year on my daughter's birthday, I send I say a prayer for her birth mom, right? I...I wish I could someone could just let her birth mom know that although she couldn't raise her for whatever reason that well she's amazing..." (Carla: 527)*

Denise works as a psychotherapist and thinks that the experiences of awe has added to her feeling of compassion and empathy for people, and she finds it inspiring in her therapeutic relationships when she sees people make changes in their lives:

*“...a lot of on a spectrum of compassion and empathy this really feeling like compassion and empathy for people that have gone through really challenging situations.” (Denise: 666)*

## **Motivation**

Three participants shared that their experiences of awe have served as motivation for them. Carla is revitalised by awe:

*“it energises me and it makes me feel more alive, it makes me feel more like you know stand tall or be proud or be connected...” (Carla: 1543)*

Anna and Elizabeth are both motivated in their spiritual practices- Anna as a practising Catholic and Elizabeth as a Buddhist. Anna’s experience of religious awe evoked a powerful sense of connectedness to God. This has increased her understanding and motivation to practise her faith:

*“keeps me more motivated to keep growing my faith and to keep practising my faith... I can feel I can understand things...” (Anna: 434)*

Elizabeth’s experiences of awe and wonder that occur with regular meditation and mindfulness practices serve as validation and reward for her effort:

*“...it’s been and it’s really hard and you know to sit with all your stuff...those moments make it worth, make it all worth it...you realise this is why I’m doing it. I’m doing all of this because it leads to something so much better uhm... Yeah, like a sense of freedom (deep breath and exhale)” (Elizabeth: 339)*

## **Therapeutic Value**

Six participants talked about awe having a therapeutic value in their lives, whether professionally or personally. Four participants are practising psychotherapists and have found that awe has made an impact on their work. On the professional front, Anna has experienced the therapeutic effects of awe and connectedness in her practice and sees a therapeutic shift in client work where there is greater relational depth between her and the client:



*“That experience is... very therapeutic. It’s the way I see. And when it happens...in therapy for example those are moments that not only myself but the client is also very touched and moving and...something change in the client...”*

*(Anna: 202)*

She believes that the experience is helpful in that it facilitates positive and healthy changes and brings about ‘happiness’:

*“It’s the kind of experience that can help people... I truly believe that this stage of movement is very positive, is very healthy. So I want that to happen. Right? So I started to cultivate it to happen to hopefully (inaudible) happiness as frequently as possible in therapy.” (Anna: 252)*

Gloria shared that in her 35 years of practice as a psychotherapist, she has and continues to face a lot of suffering. Her experiences of awe help her to hold on to hope amidst the suffering which seems to help ground her in her therapeutic presence for her clients and not give in to despair. Awe plays a supportive role in enabling her to continue her work:

*“As a therapist really it most directly informs me there...those experiences are part of what helped me hold hope for my clients who are suffering right uhm and help me stay the course from getting you know sucked into the struggle of this lifetime...it influences me on a sort of*

*philosophical level...not hard to look to see good in the world uhm so for me now that keeps me capable of not just dissolving into despair."*

*(Gloria: 660)*

Denise enjoys helping people connect with themselves in her role as a psychotherapist and in her personal lives. Her experiences lead her to think about ways to help people connect with awe-inspiring moments in their everyday lives:

*"...how can I help people connect with the things within themselves that are really beautiful and awe-inspiring and also just like every day regular mundane things that people write off as like not important that actually really are...with my clients and even with my friends and family that like I help uplift them as much as I can and share these experiences with them so that they can think of something differently or have a different perspective" (Denise: 85)*

Beatrice's experience of awe in grieving collectively through art and music has given her the lived experience and meaning to the theories of grief that she has read about and that has added conviction to what she relays to clients.

*"...learning about how to be present with myself in grief and then it's..there's many contained times for like acute moments and that it's perfectly okay to come back around to something... 'should be over it'*

*like- that doesn't exist... I've watched that and I think I knew it and read it and I would say it to clients there's no prescription for grief blah blah blah, but I am watching it..." (Beatrice: 534)*

Fiona described herself as a worrier and thinks that awe has allowed her "not to worry" or be too caught up in her anxieties and also has helped her to "*embrace the world and stay in the present moment.*" (Fiona: 972)

For Carla, awe has a therapeutic value that extends beyond the moment. In times of emotional distress, she is able to actively recall the memory of her awe experience and reconnect with the feeling of being cared for:

*" So when I am ...kind of feeling not good or something I want to sort of be able to close my eyes...and just remember the guardians and the message they gave me and bring that into my body so I'll feel better and I'll remind myself that although this moment I'm feeling like a tiny dot in this world that nobody cares, I realise actually that there's something bigger than me that does care, so that's what awe is to me..." (Carla: 216)*

## Gratitude and doing good

Four participants described being in gratitude for their experiences and for the Earth. Elizabeth, who recycles and is mindful about her environmental impact, feels a more emotive and deeper appreciation for the Earth that goes beyond her ordinary state of gratitude. Moments of awe leave her with an elevated sense of privilege:

*“...so much more appreciative of the planet because I think you know we’re trying, I’ve been trying for a long time to sort of you know play a part in recycling and being more careful with resources and things like that but this is a much deeper feeling of gosh how lucky we are to have uhm tsk this world and a deeper feeling and knowing uhm and of appreciation and sort of wonder of yeah how amazing it is, yeah it’s a much deeper level...” (Elizabeth: 87)*

*“... just how precious it is and just a deeper sense of how lucky we are to have it uhm and again it’s a feeling it’s not “oh we’re so lucky to have this amazing planet”, it’s... REAL, and it’s not all the time it’s only when I have these moments...how awestruck I am by the preciousness of it...” (Elizabeth: 153)*

Carla, who has had many awe experiences in beautiful places is simultaneously aware of her privilege and wonders about other people who may not have her privilege. Being

empathic and aware of different realities, she tries to not take her experiences for granted and has developed a sense of protectiveness for those who are less privileged:

*“I have so many experiences that I know so many people have not had...when I’m holding these two things I’m understanding my blessings and I don’t know why I got to be the person to be so privileged and I’m aware that so many are not. So that kind of balancing it out kind of I guess maybe I, you know in some ways tries to keep me centred but I think what it does for me, it tries to remind me that I need to be responsible with it, not taking it for granted. (Carla: 405)*

Gratitude that comes with her awe experiences leave a lasting impact on Carla as it translates to a greater sense of conviction and responsibility towards not just herself (i.e. to live with gratitude) but also towards communities beyond herself:

*“I have just grown in my gratitude... I’ve also grown in my fierceness in protecting the underdog or protecting those who cannot protect themselves that kind of thing- so that’s what that’s the change it did for me.” (Carla: 824)*

*“I’m overwhelmed by gratitude at the time...I’m connected you know to the Universe... I feel like so somehow there must be a responsibility of*

*mine to somehow share this or at least in my every day life remember it so that I live with gratitude.” (Carla:579)*

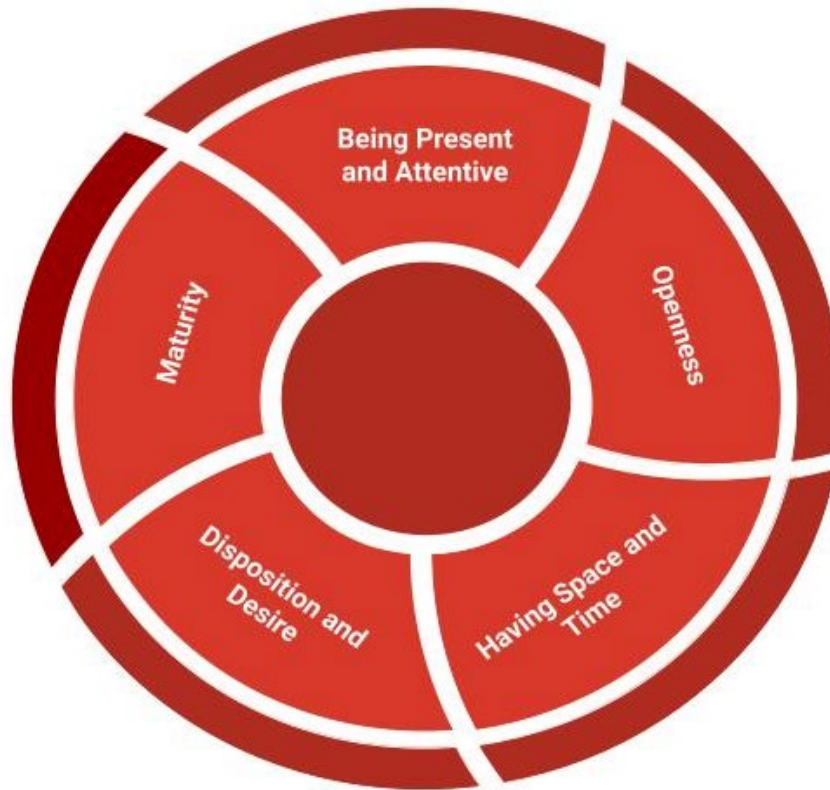
Gloria’s awe experiences fuel her hopefulness and gratitude (Gloria: 658) while Denise Denise feels “*very grateful and appreciative*” (Denise: 164) and thinks about how to make her part of the world a better place:

*“I think that was one of the more recent experiences of awe that I’ve had that really kind of stands out as like you have a very specific place in the universe I guess and that’s like I always look at that like how can I help make my corner just a little better...” (Denise: 59)*

Denise contributes to the world through her profession as a psychotherapist which gives her a sense of purpose and meaning. Her participation in this research project was also a way to engage with a cause that she thinks may add value to people: “*...just feels like such powerful work to me, it gives me this sense of like real purpose it’s a very like purposeful passionate job for me so I just really love like helping people come to those realisations within themselves and gives me a deep sense of meaning to do that work and a deep sense of gratitude and appreciation...*” (Denise: 697)

*“...contributing something to a cause that’s greater than myself so I like to be involved like that, that you need this research, and it goes on and does something incredible for the world that people wouldn’t have had access to before...and just like contributes to the overall good to society.” (Denise: 1091)*

### 5.3 Group Experiential Theme III: The psychological facilitators of awe



*Figure 7: Group Experiential Theme III: The psychological facilitators of awe*

#### **Being present and attentive**

One of the major factors that help facilitate awe is being present in the moment and being attentive to the world around them. This was shared by six participants.

Anna spoke about being present in terms of releasing worries and distractions to be in the moment. Being present also had a relational element of being intentionally with people:



*“Being present, being in the moment and just let any worry, any tension, let it go... is that quietness, internal personal quietness, absence of worries...” (Anna: 602)*

*“Being present with my client and with the group and just be myself and be there, no distractions nothing, just live in that moment by what the moment is and having that intention to be there with people...” (Anna: 217)*

Elizabeth maintains a regular meditation and mindfulness practice and feels awe frequently looking at everyday scenes and objects. She attributes it to being able to perceive things clearly as she is not caught up in her own world of thoughts:

*“..it’s not unusual for me to have that feeling once a day just by uhm seeing for example a tree trunk and feeling that sense of wonder because I can just see it more clearly now because I’m not caught up in all my thoughts...I can just see things more for what they really are and uhm that creates a feeling a really joyful feeling and uhm a feeling of awe...” (Elizabeth: 65)*

Fiona echoes similar sentiments that awe can be felt if one can still the processes of projecting into the future and ruminating about the past:

*"I find that if one can be forget about the clock, forget about what one's supposed to be doing, what one feels one should have achieved by X hour or what one should have been achieved today or following day or even yesterday there is something about being in the present moment...where one can really feel that sense of awe." (Fiona: 760)*

Additionally, she described how she responded to the anxieties about whether her daughter would be alright during her performance. Instead of letting them play out and distract her from the moment, she called upon a teaching from spiritual leader and monk to sooth herself and accept the presence of fear without trying to get rid of it:

*"I could feel myself thinking is she gonna be okay, is she going to just trust and uhm I read a lot of Ticht Naht Hanh and I sort of had him on my shoulder because it was saying you know your fear for her is your own, and you just say to your fear hello fear, I am with you, and I don't tell it to go away but understand why the fear is there, the fear is actually not necessary." (Fiona: 346)*

Being present for some participants also meant paying attention to the world around them. Carla's experience of awe at a lake that she had been to multiple times over the years was preceded by her actively paying attention and appreciating the beauty

around her in detail. Catching sight of the guardians by the lake was a reward for her paying attention to the beauty around her:

*“I wasn't just sort of by-passing the beauty I was looking I was going like God, the trees, the colour...I was even looking at small things like my feet in the lake. I was LOOKING, right? And in the looking I was given the gift of seeing this particular beautiful thing...” (Carla:183)*

Denise shared that attentiveness to the “*smaller moments*” (Denise: 1205) of gratitude and honour for what is present in the world helps her to access the sense of connectedness and expansiveness that comes with awe. She consciously takes time to pause and appreciate as a contrast to going about her day in an unthinking manner:

*“When otherwise they could be so easily overlooked so that's just a nice feeling to know like that uplifting sense of connection can happen the more that we're kind of aware of ourselves and like the surroundings.” (Denise: 1212)*

*“I really do try and make an effort, especially for my own mental health it really seems to make such a huge difference for me to stop and be present and appreciate what's going on around me instead of just like going through the motions...” (Denise: 518)*

Gloria's experience with the wild elephant took all her attention as she seemed to be completely present and absorbed by the experience. There also seemed to be a sense of respect for it as they retreated and made space for observing the elephant from a distance.

*"...we just both simultaneously stood up and in the presence of this incredible beast we just walked backwards into our tent uhm and stood and watched it... was like the whole world disappeared and all we were in that moment together being like gobsmacked." (Gloria: 100)*

## **Openness**

Openness was a factor that contributed to the experience of awe for six of the participants. Annie and Gloria both described being present and open to the phenomenon that was unfolding without any action or intervention on their part.

Annie added that too much effort may instead disrupt the process of things unravelling as relates that to both her Taichi and psychotherapy practice:

*"By being there, things will happen. In Taichi the movement happens and in therapy too, movement happens. It is like when you try to do too much, doesn't work." (Annie: 613)*

Gloria emphasised that in her encounter with the wild elephant, what facilitated the experience was purely being present and not engaging in action. There seemed to be a state of suspension of effortful mental and physical activity in her state of awe:

*“... there was nothing for us to do, it didn’t ask anything more than just uhm breathe, stay calm, stay present, allow, allow it to happen...in a state of awe where I am not a do-er. I’m not making anything happen, I’m not even like pushing or planning or you know...I am invited to be present and that’s. It.” (Gloria: 123)*

Some participants indicated an openness to experiences and possibilities that are different from their set routines, and a willingness to respond to the moment. Carla’s experience of awe at the lake was preceded by her paying attention to her surroundings and being embodied and attuned to her environment:

*“...body at that moment was open to receive that” (Carla:171)*

Denise, in her awe experience of chancing upon deers at a trail near her home, spoke about going down a familiar path and listening to her intuition to take a different route. She had a similar experience of having a sudden instinct to go outside where she had a moment of awe and connection with a butterfly as she acknowledged the magnitude of its ability to survive and navigate the world. In both instances, being open to possibilities

and change as well as trusting the intuition seem to have contributed to her having awe experiences:

*“I don’t know why I just trust to go left instead of right that day but like I did and it took us into this you know different area that we got to see these deer crossing the path.” (Denise: 966)*

*“...what a beautiful little moment that I wouldn’t have had had I not just followed that instinct to like go outside” (Denise: 352)*

Beatrice had a similar experience where she had not intended to be at the memorial concert where she had experience awe in collective grief, but paid attention to her surge of feeling that she had to go:

*“a few days before I just was overwhelmed with this feeling of you know I want to be there. It’s really important...I can make it work; I want to make this work. (Beatrice: 40)*

Fiona seemed to be open to unusual experiences where she could find amazement rather than fear:

*“...maybe I thought it was a ghost in the night- this extraordinary experience of something coming through ...it was quite amazing uhm at that time and i can remember feeling not frightened... (Fiona: 859)*

In addition to openness to new experiences, Beatrice and Gloria also mentioned an openness to their own emotional worlds. Being open to and willingness to experience the breadth and depth of feelings seem to contribute to their ability to experience awe which comes with complex emotions:

*“I feel the openness in myself more now... like the ability to be more connected to myself allows me to experience higher highs and lower lows and depth of emotion.” (Beatrice: 360)*

*“I’m pretty comfy. I love riding the waves of a variety of emotions...that doesn’t bother me so I think if you have that emotional flexibility then maybe there’s a bit of room for it.” (Gloria:568)*

## **Having space and time**

Four participants referred to having psychological space and time as factors that helped them to access awe. Carla, who has retired from her job, described having more time to slow down and appreciate her surroundings:

*“I am retired particularly I get to spend more time being quiet and going like you know going for a walk...when you’re retired those things are happening all the time and so yeah it’s just grown I think.” (Carla: 1103)*

*“I have more time now to sort of be more...aware...see I don’t know if I would notice the guardian when I was so busy...I believe there’s a care to that I do believe it is part of my appreciating it all uhm and the part that I’ve been able to slow down... (Carla: 274)*

Denise shared a similar sentiment of being able to “slow down and have...appreciation” (Denise: 1158). She also referred to the notion of spaciousness to be able to notice and discern experiences that would otherwise be deemed as ordinary:

*“... you have to kind of have enough space in your life I guess to even know to appreciate something... just within yourself you have to have enough wherewithal to kind of appreciate those experiences or be able to distinguish them from what is otherwise like a pretty regular day...” (Denise: 1149)*

On the other hand, being overly busy and tired makes it difficult for Denise to access awe:



*“I feel like kind of congested in my body like I feel like you know drained or tired just like ugh I don’t really have enough energy to even just stop for like a few minutes and so when I feel like that it’s a lot harder to feel those experiences of awe.” (Denise: 505)*

Fiona and Elizabeth referred to taking time to declutter thoughts that may get in the way of being present to awe. In addition, Fiona also allows her experience of sensations and feelings to form and shift with time when she experiences awe in nature, which is different to how she may experience awe in other contexts:

*“...that really happens when you just when you have time just to still to sort out the thoughts and just dissipate...and then you see and you sense and you feel in a way that wouldn’t have been able to happen if you’d just been planted there... it evolves in the time that you’re being...”*  
*(Fiona: 744)*

Elizabeth described being dedicated to a regular meditation practice that helps her to be present and clear-minded, which contributes to more frequent awe experiences:

*“I’ve noticed that I have these more frequently so it’s like a consistency really I suppose is the ingredient with my meditation practice...like picking up the garbage so that time is often just used to kind of uhm take out all of those kind of thoughts...kind of clearing and then I think what*

*happens is I'm just able to be more present uhm during moments in the day..." (Elizabeth:203)*

## **Disposition and desire**

Three participants spoke of having an innate disposition and desire for awe experiences. Some participants relate the sense of connection that they feel in awe to being human. Beatrice yearns for connection and emotional authenticity that moves her and makes her feel human. While the intensity of emotions is not sustainable, she finds that experiences of grief allow people to relate to one another with more openness and honesty, and being able to remove the facade gives her relief:

*"I would feel like relieved during times of intense grief ...we are all together it's like we can finally let our guards down and be real like even if it's just for the wake or during the funeral where people are really open with each other, like the artifice or the sort of like masks of like daily life are...are lifted for just a temporary time in grief." (Beatrice: 180)*

*"Because I have a yearning for connection and realness...not that we have go be crying all the time but...something starts to move there's like this open channel kind of feeling in times of like intense feeling... and I think when I say it was very human i think that's what I...what I yearn for in connection..." (Beatrice: 194)*

Gloria also describes a sense of yearning for experiences of connectedness with other people:

*“I believe that there is a human longing for to know that you know to return to that sense of oneness and the opportunity to return to it with other humans...”* (Gloria: 496)

She is also inclined towards transcendental experiences and makes conscious efforts to seek them out through exploration of natural places or her inner world. She also seems willing and able to deal with the discomfort of exploring the unknown:

*“I like these experiences, and I want them, so there is some orientation to experience the world first hand...I like getting out of my own way, I like that transcendent experience...”* (Gloria: 533)

*“I have purposely taken myself out into environments where that speaks to me, at that level, you know. I purposely gone on an intensive retreat environment you know, I’ve (inaudible) gone exploring in places that make me uncomfortable, you know.”* (Gloria: 584)

On the other hand, when Carla spoke about taking time to experience her surroundings and feel awe, she attributes that she is *“almost aching for that feeling again”* (Carla:

1442) as it gives her absolute peace and refuge in a chaotic world which she hopes to extend to the world:

*“Because I find that the world is uhm so fast paced and there’s you know I try not to read the news and everything ...and we just been through the pandemic...There’s so much sadness in the world, and I think for that moment, (pause) some days I just feel like I just want to breath in that, all that feeling because I just want to breathe it out to the world and say ‘here’.”(Carla: 1445)*

## **Maturity**

This research project had a sample demographic of people aged 35 to 65 as middle adulthood is a time where one engages with generativity and stagnation as well as isolation, as detailed in Section 4.3. Participants were asked about whether or not maturity in age had any impact on their experiences or sense-making of their awe experiences. Three participants perceived a difference in how emotionally open and present they are in their current age than when they were younger, while one participant reflected that the way in which awe was experienced felt the same even though life experiences and challenges have initiated a shift in how she lived, leading to more awe experiences

Beatrice shared that as a younger person, she was less inclined towards emotions and more focused on academic excellence. She has since consciously created a life that supports the expression of feelings. She also reflected on how her younger self would have navigated grief and believes that she would not have allowed grief to emerge in her creative process the same way she was able to in her current state of mind:

*"I think what's a big difference is that I've carved out and sought out and co-created environments and relationships where it's okay to be weirdly feeling, it's okay to be weepy or I don't know honest... when I was younger...I was in a faculty that was all about excellence not about feeling...I have created a life where that's possible, more possible."*

(Beatrice: 494)

Beatrice's close friend experienced a loss at a time when they were working on a project. She reflected on how they had allowed grief to be present instead of avoiding it, which would have been how her younger self would have handled it:

*"...we were very much engaged in the material and not pushing aside her grief like it was just very present. So even something about that that's very radical like taboo in a way like oh we should be studying so let's put that sad stuff away ...that would have been my 20- something year old self's response I think."* (Beatrice: 577)

Beatrice also credited her own growth in emotional capacity to her awareness in maturity as well as the intensive training as a psychotherapist which allows her to be more open and connected to herself and her feelings. Furthermore, she seems to be projecting further growth in awareness as she imagines herself at a much older age looking back at herself in the present and marvelling at how much more she has developed:

*“... I think if I was 72 I’d be like God I didn’t know anything when I was 41 I was just a little mouse then now I’m like this giant hog... but I think I was really I was young and not... sort of like only aware of this much of my experience and now I’m just completed a very intensive training and as a therapist, I am beginning work as a therapist I’ve explored a lot more psycho-physical connective movement work so I’m more informed and my body is more informed, I am more integrated with myself now so I guess one of the images I or like metaphors I used earlier was the channel being open and I feel the openness in myself more now... like the ability to be more connected to myself allows me to experience higher highs and lower lows and depth of emotion.” (Beatrice: 349)*

Fiona expressed that her younger self would have been less able to regulate her emotions, and that fear which sometimes accompanies awe would have been the

dominant emotion. Furthermore, she is now more able attune to the sense of stillness than when she was younger and more impacted by external events:

*“I think back on the experiences of awe when I was younger and...my ability to uhm kind of hold my fear and not be uhm overwhelmed by it were different, I don’t think I had that then. I think I would sometimes let my own emotional state run past so the feeling of awe would be lessened.” (Fiona: 425)*

*“I got a strong perception that I was so wrapped up in the...in all that the world was, ‘cause I wasn’t able to actually really feel that sense of stillness.” (Fiona: 801)*

Carla shared a similar sentiment of being more worried and preoccupied as a younger person:

*“...as a young person... I spent a lot of time worrying about what other people thought of me and I... was always worried about other kids... I was so unsure of myself...” (Carla: 1043)*

In addition to being more able to hold emotions, the polarity of security and adventure also emerged for Carla and Gloria. Carla reflected that material stability in her older years has given her insight on how experiences matter more. There is sense of the

relentless pursuit of material goals giving way to more gratitude and appreciation for life:

*“...because I’ve aged and you know I own a house and I’m secure... you just really start to realize what matters in life and it isn’t the thing, it’s the experience.” (Carla: 1091)*

*“...when you’re young, you’re always going after then going after...but when you get to a certain age and you got all that...you start to realise when you got it all at some point it has to be about appreciating, it has to be about being aware of how fortunate you are...” (Carla: 1134)*

On the other hand, Gloria has leaned towards material security in her later years, which contrasts with her more adventurous, risk-taking way of living as a younger person. Tending to her concrete and material needs seems to come at the expense of physical and spiritual adventures that evokes awe in her:

*“I have become less aware of awe or have less experiences of awe in that more conservative uhm you know, put your head down try and make some money, work hard. I’ve been less in pursuit of intensive personal experience and more in pursuit of uh stabilising my financial foundation...I don’t really enjoy it as much as previous lifestyles that I’ve led.” (Gloria: 611)*



While Gloria continues to have experiences of awe, it seems that being more impulsive and spontaneous have facilitated more awe experiences.

*“...the last ten years the path I’ve taken has been to curb some of that impulsive fun and walk on more (pause) uh...culturally...more...mainstream lifestyle? And... so I will say that middle of the road lifestyle of seeking you know stable finances uhm as a primary goal has just been less awe-inspiring.” (Gloria: 635)*

Although her current lifestyle does not support frequent awe experiences, the actual experience of awe is felt the same way:

*“I would say the internal experience and that sense of preciousness is the same, that has remained throughout my life.” (Gloria: 605)*

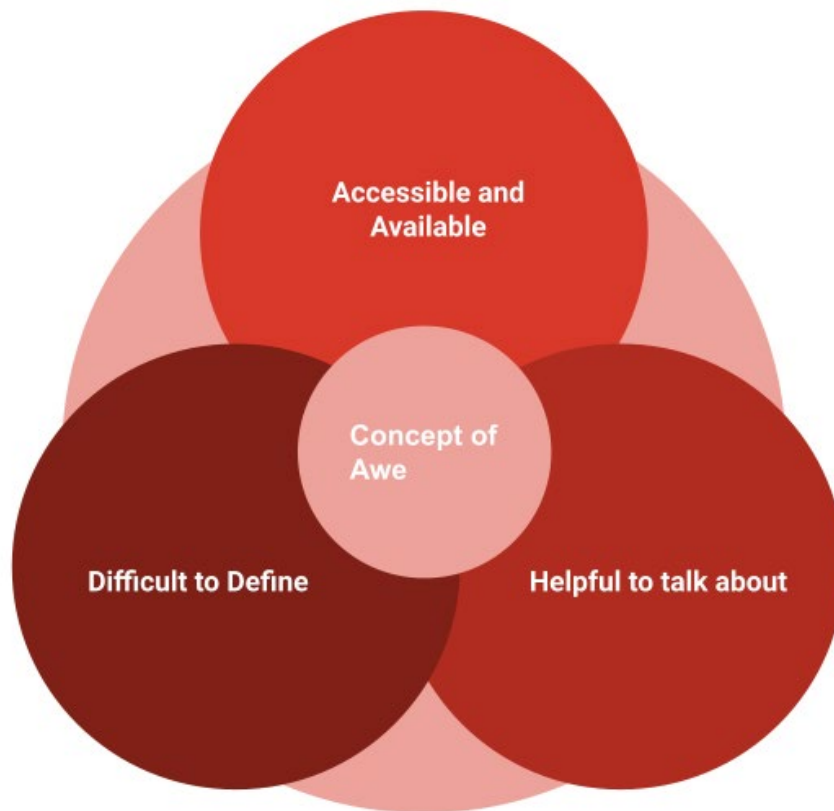
Denise also described that she experienced awe in the same way throughout maturity.

*“I kind of see awe the same way now and still connected to nature in the same way...like particular situations have changed in terms of awe but that kind of underlying thread I feel like hasn’t. From childhood I find that it kind of continued into my adult life in a similar way. (Denise: 646)*

Elizabeth would have experienced awe and wonder the same way throughout maturity, although suffering provoked a change in her way of life that brought her to incorporate mindfulness and meditation in her life, which helped her to feel awe regularly:

*“...awe and wonder 20 years ago it would have been the same I  
imagine, (trails off) ...I do think though you do have to kind of uhm well  
for me anyway, you have to have some sort of suffering and kind to have  
to get to a point where you’re like “this is just, just not good!” (exclaims)  
and uhm like again a stimulus that makes you do something to change.”  
(Elizabeth:784)*

#### 5.4 Group Experiential Theme IV: The conceptualisation of awe- how is awe perceived?



*Figure 8: Group Experiential Theme IV: The conceptualisation of awe*

##### **Difficult to define and describe in words**

Six participants shared that it was challenging to define awe and to describe their experiences in words. In interviews, it was common to find participants pausing as they tried to put words to their experiences. There was a sense of awe being big and beyond definition:

*"I can see why you're immersed in this project because it's such a huge word, indefinable almost."* (Beatrice: 216)

*"...awe is to me it's that ...it's beyond it's sort of beyond my ability to understand it it's so... it's so big."* (Carla: 230)

*"I feel the word awe you know it's something, it's such a little word but such a big feeling (laughs)"* (Carla: 32)

*"...the very word which is only three letters is actually very hard to define."* (Fiona: 2017)

In addition to the concept of awe being difficult to define, some participants expressed the challenge of articulating their phenomenon and their experiences of it in words:

*"...it doesn't really capture actually how it feels, which I know we talked about but I just didn't know how else to describe it..."* (Elizabeth: 106)

*"...well, is hard to put in words, right?"* (Annie: 661)

*"...it's just in awe I don't have the (long pause)"* (Carla: 520)

*“Not easy! It’s actually bizarrely very difficult because I’m thinking hold on what is awe?!”* (Fiona: 979)

*“It’s AWKWARD! Yeah, it’s a real real struggle! (pause) uh it’s good it’s good practice...”* (Gloria:742)

### **Accessible and available**

Although awe is difficult to define and to capture in words, four participants expressed a belief that it is accessible and available to everyone, and that it is found in smaller, ordinary moments in everyday life.

Beatrice shared a visual representation she has of awe as a way to convey her perspective on it. Awe was described as a darkened theatre with *“beautiful lighting and the beautiful projections on the screen”* with a *“bubble”* that surrounded the whole theatre. Even in the usage of imagery, Beatrice expressed that it *“makes no sense but...I don’t have quite the words but it’s this container that’s very spacious and uhm yeah there’s just a lot of space for fullness in there.”* (Beatrice:225) She later returned to the imagery and added:

*“Awe is always present for everyone and it is something we can access and be open to. It is like inspiration. I would expand or maybe animate*

*the image that I suggested before like the theatre and the stage and the sort of cloudy bubble over top of everything and I would like open the doors and see that cloudy bubble is actually just over every one, all of us, like that awe is present always in some way."*

(Beatrice: 747)

Carla also thinks that awe is available by everyone, though being in connection with the planet seems to be the qualifying factor:

*"Available to anyone provided one is connected with the planet. I think it's available to anyone...I think you would have a hard time with awe or being spiritual or even caring about the planet when you're disconnected from it." (Carla: 1307)*

She had alluded to how connection plays a part in being able to feel awe:

*"When I'm out in the world, honestly, all of it... understanding how it's all connected...I can have a spiritual moment just in my garden." (Carla: 1281)*

Denise is also able to find awe in her daily life and relates it to being connected to awe within herself. She seems to indicate awe that is more 'heart-centred' rather than

'mind-blowing, suggesting a more emotional rather than cognitively challenging experience:

*"Awe can be found in smaller or everyday moments...it's always the smaller moments to me at this point it doesn't need to be this mind blowing thing for me to feel that, that same like connection point of awe within myself I think going like this because I feel like it's a very heartfelt connection and so I like feel that like love and expansion and that heart-centred connection." (Denise: 736)*

Elizabeth echoed a similar view about awe being found in the small and the everyday, and it is up to us to see things clearly:

*"...it doesn't have to be these big things, it's the smallest everything around us...everything we need is already here everything we need to make us happy is here already, we just we can't see through the filters...it's the beauty of this world it's all here for us and uhm yeah and that feels really wonderful to know that." (Elizabeth: 923)*

## Helpful to talk about

Three participants shared that it was helpful to talk about awe. Beatrice, whose interview was conducted shortly after her awe experience, thought that speaking about it helped her to process and make sense of her experience:

*“I think just speaking with you today has reorganised the experience in me and there will be... yeah, just sort of has just slotted things into places where they belong.” (Beatrice: 658)*

Elizabeth described that recalling her memory of awe is a pleasant experience that also evokes gratitude. In addition, awe experiences are not commonly discussed in her social circle and she seems to enjoy the opportunity to speak about it:

*“...because I can sort of feel it a little bit I mean nothing like I did when it was happening, the memory of it and it's really nice, it's a really nice memory and I feel quite ...grateful that I've experienced it...” (Elizabeth: 331)*

*“It feels really nice! Uhm yeah it's nice to talk about it because actually I don't really talk about it to anybody else...” (Elizabeth: 425)*



Gloria shared that talking and reflecting on her awe experiences has helped her to clarify her experiences and also to further harvest insights and integrate them in her life, as opposed to having those moments as ‘standalone’ events:

*“I think uh that invitation to do this thinking has... grabbed those pieces more clearly...there’s something about in the moment you’re so there but then later it’s good to have some other reasons to kind of come back to them ...be reminded of them...harvest the moment a little bit more, you know? So they don’t have to be just this standalone moment.” (Gloria: 716)*

## **5.5 Summary**

Figure 9 below summarises the findings that have been distilled from the data analysis process. A total of four Group Experiential Themes have been identified and expanded upon. The findings allow us to understand how the immediate or acute experiences of awe were perceived and how the impact of the experiences continued to unfold and impact participants’ worldviews over time. In addition, participants also shared insights into the factors that have facilitated their experiences of awe, and going beyond their personal experiences of awe also revealed more broadly what they thought about awe as a phenomenon. The next chapter will discuss these findings considering the existing knowledge that I have gleaned from current literature.

## Findings



Figure 9: Summary of Group Experiential Themes

### 5.6 Reflexive Exploration

As the process of analysis began to overlap with writing up the findings, I found myself in a curious mix of being analytical and creative. In the previous stage of analysing the interviews individually and collectively, my mind was focused on being faithful to the worlds of the participants, and my interpretations were noted and checked mindfully. Crossing over to writing up the findings, I engaged with the analysis with a wish to present them in a readable way. At this point I was again noticing how many of my participants, being verbally articulate, have contributed verbatims that are rich and evocative, and thus it was a rather joyful process to select and let them showcase their own inner worlds.

It is also in the process of writing the findings that the analysis continues to delve deeper into the contrasting and similar experiences of participants. I began to really appreciate the idiographic nature of IPA and its commitment to the individual experience such that it enhances and deepens the illustration and understanding of group themes, rather than letting the individual be swept away into a collective understanding that is generalised and faceless. As I identified and wrote about group themes, the experiences, voices and expressions of the individual participants came alive in my mind. It was as if I had somehow internalised their experiences. In some ways, this was reminiscent of my work as a therapist, where many clients engage with universal struggles in their own unique ways.

In this stage of the process, I have also come to notice my frustrations with limitations as my curiosities can no longer be answered by the participants. By engaging more with the material, more questions emerged which seemed to have slipped my mind as I looked at my own responses in the transcript. My curiosities during the interviews seemed to have been guided by the need to clarify and to seek a more definitive understanding of what the participants were saying. On the other hand, stepping back and forth from the transcripts during the analysis and in writing up the findings, my curiosities take on a less immediate and broader tone as I wonder further about how else participants have engaged with their experiences. Seeing how some participants seemed to have connected with the interview and with their own experiences, I am curious about how the interview itself may come to influence their perspectives on awe. In noticing my own limitations and the limitations of the project scope, I could empathise

more with the challenges that researchers face, as if I was looking at their work more and more with both a critical eye and with respect for the work that was contributed. The pursuit of seeking and adding original knowledge can never be separated from the acknowledgement and understanding of existing knowledge. It is with this in mind that I move on to discuss what I have found in the context of what is already there.

## **6. Discussion**

This chapter is a discussion of the findings from interviews with seven participants who have experienced awe in diverse contexts. The study aims to explore their lived experiences of awe with a focus on connectedness, though not exclusively. As seen from the results, what has emerged from the semi-structured interviews were broader themes that I will evaluate and discuss with references to existing literature and research that have been previously presented in the literature review, and with new sources that are relevant to the viewpoints that have emerged. This includes existential themes that have appeared in my mind during the analysis. Following which, I will engage in reflexive evaluation of my research process and explore the implication of the study for future research and clinical practice, and end with a reflexive account of my personal experience.

### **6.1 Discussing Theme I: The Immediate Experience of Awe**

The experience of awe was explored phenomenologically with participants in order to capture the descriptive characteristics of the experience. While the contexts of the participants' experiences were varied, ranging from being out in nature or the adoption of a child, the subjective psychological experiences of the individual was my intended focus. Eight key characteristics, which were grouped into three categories:

- (i) **Challenging perceptions-** Amazing and overwhelming; Beyond understanding; Bigger than self
- (ii) **Comforting feelings-** Reassuring, Peace
- (iii) **Connecting with others-** Feelings of connectedness, Oneness, Empathy

Awe challenges participants as they are shaken out of ordinary, familiar ways of being. There is a momentary opening of possibilities that have not been considered before, and participants shared a feeling of disbelief and amazement that the phenomenon unravelling before them was even possible. Gloria was gobsmacked by her encounter with the wild elephant on a safari, and Carla and Denise's amazement of the resilience of nature thriving against all odds are experiences of new possibilities that were not considered before, and a reminder that the world has, as Denise describes, "*the potential to shock and amaze us*" (Denise: 820). Wilson (1972, p.225) proposes that a healthy mind requires 'newness', 'otherness', much like how healthy lungs need fresh air. In contrast, automated living gives way to imprisonment where one is habituated within the confines of one's limitations. In this case, the amazement and disbelief that is felt in awe challenges the participants' perceived limitations of what is possible for themselves and the world around them. However, newness does not necessarily mean encountering things that were never seen before, as novelty may lie in the eyes of the beholder. Elizabeth, for example, experiences awe and wonder frequently from perceiving familiar everyday objects with fresh eyes like she has "*never seen them like that before*" (Elizabeth:102). This seems to resonate with Weger and Wagemann (2018) who suggest that it is the individual's framing of the phenomenon that gives it

significance and inspires awe, and hence one can be amazed if one can find newness in a familiar object.

In addition to amazement, participants have also come face to face with the limits of their understanding as their awe experiences challenge what they can rationally believe it. Carla was faced with such disbelief when her newly adopted daughter chose to go towards her over a familiar caregiver. She was in awe and saw that as a message from God that she was meant to be her mother. It was unbelievable yet deeply personally meaningful. This seems to be in line with Keltner and Haidt's (2003) prototype definition of awe in which 'accommodation' is a key feature. Accommodation refers to the Piagetian process of adjusting mental structures that cannot assimilate a new experience and revising their existing schema of the world. The authors emphasise that awe brings about a need for accommodation, and suggests that when the need is met, awe is experienced as enlightening rather than terrifying. When faced with disbelief, participants seemed to accommodate and make sense of their experiences in different ways, such as Carla's interpretation that her being a mother was the result of a divine intervention. However, 'making sense of' does not simply refer to the process of rationalising in the mind. Rather, as what Velichkov (2019) suggests, it could be a leap of faith where one comes to know truth in a way that surpasses the need for rationality and is involved in grappling with paradoxical and opposing forces. This can also be seen in other participants' experiences, such as Beatrice's experience of collective grief when she encounters a celebration of life while acknowledging loss, as well as Gloria's experience of being unquestionably known by a stranger during a group retreat. At the

same time, accommodation and sense-making can also mean an acknowledgement and acceptance for the unknown without a further need for interpretation, such as Anna and Denise's experiences when they recognize that there are simply things they do not understand. Perhaps, being able to be with the unknown relates to what Schneider (2014) refers to as an awe-based consciousness, which involves retaining a sense of wonder at the mystery of existence.

The challenging aspect of awe also involves the recognition of something larger than the self or being part of something bigger. This was a common experience amongst the interviewees and can be discussed in relation to both Keltner and Haidt's (2003) concept of 'vastness' and the 'small-self' concept proposed by Piff et al. (2015). Keltner's proposed 'vastness' referred to anything that is perceived as being much larger than the self, and though he did not restrict that to physical size, experimental studies of awe that followed tended to present vastness in the literal sense of grand structures and places in nature. In addition, the "small-self" concept proposed by Piff et al. (2015) refers to a relatively diminished sense of self in relation to something deemed vaster than the individual, and awe produces the "small-self" effect that promotes prosocial behaviours as people diminish their own interests vis-a-vis the interests of the greater collective. What the participants' experiences reveal in the phenomenological experience of awe, is that awe may provide one with perspective over one's relative smaller concerns, but rather than feeling small, participants such as Gloria and Denise described feelings of expansiveness and being uplifted, as if they themselves were growing in the midst of feeling awe. This resonates with Weger and Wagemann's



(2018) first-person inquiry into awe where they felt an “inner expansion to the greatness of the experience” and that it was an uplifting experience. Similarly, just as Schopenhauer (Schopenhauer & Payne, 1966) describes, the participants were not oppressed, but rather exalted by its immensity. In other words, rather than simply feeling small, it is possible that one can simultaneously recognize one’s smallness in relation to something bigger, while feeling expanded by the experience. The co-existence of expansiveness and being uplifted alongside with a recognition of one’s own relative smallness seems to resonate with the current understanding that awe can increase humility (Stellar et al., 2017) and diminish the sense of self without reducing self-esteem or a personal sense of power (Bai et al., 2017). The exceptional case here was Fiona, who described that awe can sometimes produce a sense of disempowerment and make an individual feel small. However, Fiona also has had experiences of awe that are expansive and spiritual in nature, which she focused her reflections on. What determines whether one feels disempowered or exalted would be an interesting area of future study, though presently there are studies that indicate that more difficult experiences of awe involve feelings of threat that may come in different contexts such as in social interactions, nature, or in religious settings where one feels powerlessness (Gordon et al., 2017).

The amazement and overwhelming nature of awe and the uplifting qualities that many participants experience also resonate with Schneider’s (2011, p.249) view that awe can bring forth the ‘thrill and lift’ of being part of something much larger than themselves. Although it may be tempting to assume that awe experiences evoke excitement, what

was surprising was that the data revealed a sense of peace and assurance that was shared amongst many participants. Elizabeth and Gloria shared that amidst the thrill and other excitable emotions, they could feel peace and stillness, which suggests a paradoxical mix of excitement and serenity that participants are able to hold. Elizabeth sheds light into her experience of stillness that she attributes to not wanting to control the experience, nor having any self-referential thoughts during the process. Maslow (1964) elucidates this well in his description of peak experiences, in which he proposes that one perceives the world in a way that is more detached from human concerns and also more free of projections of human purposes upon it. Rather, the subject can regard the object in its own being, and not something to be reacted towards. Furthermore, what was interesting was the participant's mention of being reassured that their own existence and that of the planet will be okay. This reassurance seems to emerge as an insight and a feeling, though for Denise for example it could also involve some further interpretation as she sees her awe experiences as signs from the Universe that she is at the right place and time in life. Thus far, research literature has made little mention of the qualitative feelings of peace and reassurance that come with awe experiences. However, a broader look at literature of peak experiences indicates serenity as a feature. Maslow (1971) suggests that with physical age, the intensity of peak moments give way to sustained phases of serenity which he also refers to as 'plateau-experiences'. The sustained yet mellow experience differs from peak experiences that may be euphoric and emotionally intense. As the participants are between the ages of 35 to 65, their experiences of finding stillness and serenity even amidst the excitement seem to concur with Maslow's idea.

It is curious that Elizabeth and Carla felt some reassurance that things (e.g. the planet or themselves) will be alright and that existential threats to the planet and to life seem to quieten with awe experiences. Reassurance for Elizabeth also comes with an appreciation of the planet's intelligence that will ensure its survival, independent of human involvement and a recognition that human beings are not central to the world, pointing to a sense of humility evoked by awe (Stellar et al., 2018). Carla had a similar sense of reassurance that everything (ie. the planet, people, and the self) will be okay. Although current quantitative study on awe indicates positive impact that awe has on emotional wellbeing by increasing joy (Sturm et al., 2022), what the participants shared in this study seems to suggest a kind of knowing or insight that spoke to the continuing existence of themselves and the broader world, perhaps addressing their existential anxiety and uncertainty.

Connectedness is an area of interest in this study and an inclusion criterion for participation. All participants experienced some feelings of connectedness in their awe experiences, though what they were connected to may differ. Anna had a powerful experience of religious awe where she felt connected to God, while Fiona felt connected to other people in the concert and others felt connected to the nature around them and the Universe. Participants who had experienced awe in group contexts described a simultaneous awareness of togetherness and separateness. In the midst of their respective concert experiences, Beatrice and Fiona felt moments of connectedness as they shared the experiences with other people while also recognizing

that each unique individual was present with their own “*suchness*” (Fiona: 452), and that even if they were having different experiences, the “*human-ness*” (Beatrice: 108) of being together felt like a moving experience. Anna, in her own group experience, saw that she could still separate from the group if she wanted to and did not lose her sense of autonomy. This seems to be in line with a study that found that awe experiences while being self-transcendent, elicited both self-relevant thoughts and connectedness simultaneously, rather than encouraging other-focused thoughts exclusively (Nelson-Coffey et al., 2019). Similarly, quantitative research by Travis et al. (2022) showed a strong correlation between lower ‘Fusion with Others’ scores and more frequent peak experiences. Fusion with Others defines the extent to which the sense of self is embedded in others, where lower levels relate to greater differentiation of self. What the participants reveal may mean that connectedness to other people in awe is experienced in such a way that enables an awareness that people are connected and separate at the same time. It is possible to feel connected to others in a transcendental moment of awe without losing oneself to the other, and to appreciate the differences in subjective experiences without diminishing the sense of togetherness.

However, Gloria added a more nuanced take on connectedness and highlights that her experience of connectedness goes beyond what the word suggests- two distinct and separate parts connected to one another. She experienced a dissolution of her separate self to the point where she felt oneness and did not think that the word ‘connectedness’ could adequately describe what she sometimes experienced of awe. Other participants also described a feeling of oneness with the wider environment.

Oneness was described as being one with the other, whether the other be people as in the case of Anna, or with nature as in the case of Carla and Fiona, and as participants tended to speak about this feeling with pleasantness in their tones and a willingness to experience it. Fiona's experience of feeling awe and oneness happens in the context of her being alone in nature, which resonates with the study of awe walks amongst older adults (Sturm et al., 2022). Despite taking walks alone, they experienced greater increases in feelings of connectedness being part of something larger than themselves. Oneness may also be understood as an awareness of the non-dual or boundary-less nature of reality often described in Eastern philosophies and mysticism, also referred to as 'unity consciousness' by Wilber (2000) or described as the attribute of 'wholeness' in peak experiences (Maslow, 1962).

Another point of difference was Elizabeth's experience. Although in the experience of awe she feels connected with others, not having opportunities to share about her experiences in her social circle makes her feel potentially lonely, which she deems as paradoxical. Although loneliness was not felt during her experience of awe, Elizabeth raises a pertinent point where one may feel isolated if their experience is considered unusual and under-discussed socially. Perhaps, psychotherapy and therapists can play a role in providing a reflective space for people to discuss and harness insights from awe experiences and further research may help us to better understand how to better support the reflective process.

The experience of connectedness in awe also seemed to give rise to a deeper relational depth. Although only Anna and Gloria specifically mentioned this and were in the minority, their experiences seemed uniquely profound. The feeling of knowing and being known by a virtual stranger was shared by both- Anna perceiving and intuiting things about someone she did not know, and Gloria feeling deeply known by someone whom she has never met. While there is literature that relates awe experiences with feelings of connectedness and empathy for others, the feelings of knowing and being known seem unexplored. What Anna and Gloria have experienced seem to resonate with Cooper's (2005) concept of relational depth in psychotherapy- defined as a state of profound connectedness and engagement that can be powerful and memorable as threshold events and that involves very high levels of empathy and understanding. This is also reminiscent of Buber's I-Thou (2020) way of relating also comes to mind as one is mutually regarded and regards the other with intense presence. Although Cooper (2005) centred on individual psychotherapy, relational depth can be experienced beyond the therapeutic encounter. Gloria's experience of being undoubtedly known by the meditation master was certainly deeply held by her as she was moved to tears recounting the moment. Anna's feeling of deeply knowing the other was also experienced as something that transcended the cognitive level, which may be described as a more 'I-It' way of knowing somebody through learning facts and information about them. Both participants' experience of knowing and being known seemed profound, despite them being in situations with strangers who have never met. The participants' experiences of knowing and being known calls upon the question of existential isolation, described by Yalom (1980) as the unbridgeable gap between self

and other as we face our conflicting desire to be part of a larger whole and yet are aware of our fundamental isolation as we are unable to fully understand another. What the participants reveal here is an invitation to challenge the notion that we ever fully understand another and whether experiences of profound connection and awe allows us to bridge the gap between self and other and transcend existential isolation, if only for a moment in time.

## **6.2 Discussing Theme II: The Impact of Awe- Expanded hearts, expanded minds**

While many studies have examined and experimentally measured the immediate or short-term effects of awe (Piff et al., 2015; Prade & Saroglou, 2016; Sturm et al., 2022) there is considerably less information about the ways in which awe can influence one's way of being beyond the moment of awe. In this study, many participants described the ways in which their world of thoughts and feelings have expanded after the acute and immediate experience of awe. Participants discussed the gaining of new perspectives or a greater ability to empathise with others that have a potentially longer-term effect on their ways of being. Elizabeth's experiences of awe allow her to look at things from a broader perspective with different angles. Beatrice's awe-filled experience of collective grief at the memorial concert showed her a way of grieving that was creative, continuous, and celebratory of life. As a psychotherapist, she had a personal and embodied experience of grief added conviction and personal truth to what she relays to her therapy clients- that grief has no prescription. Gloria, also a psychotherapist, noted

the value of reflecting on her awe experiences. She has had many encounters with awe, but it was through active reflection that she realised how she could form a life narrative of one that is full of transformative awe experiences which would just be as valid as a life narrative of difficult struggles. Awe experiences may involve not only a momentary accommodation of mental structures as Keltner and Haidt (2003) suggest, but also affect a deeper, longer-term philosophical shift in worldviews. Gloria's experience of the interview suggests that the act of contemplation and reflection sharing about awe can lead to new ways of seeing herself and her life. This suggests therapeutic potential that active and conscious reflection of awe experiences may have, though that would need to be further investigated. Although the experiences of awe may be transient, the insights and perspectives gained from the momentary experiences may be further reflected upon and integrated into a person's way of living. In the practice of psychotherapy, much attention is given to the contemplation of life's struggles and successes to harness lessons for living. Awe experiences where one looks at oneself and the world with new lenses and possibilities can also offer valuable insights that can be further cultivated with the facilitation of the therapist.

The therapeutic impact of awe was perceived by many participants, some of whom are practising psychotherapists themselves who could translate the value of awe in their professional lives. Gloria, who is exposed to many hardships and sufferings of others through her work, finds that awe experiences help her to stay hopeful and philosophically influences her to look for the good in the world instead of "*dissolving into despair*" (Gloria: 678). Although she finds her work meaningful, it is the uplifting and



expansive nature of awe experiences that seem to serve as fuel and elevate spirits, inviting her to hope and take a leap of faith in the face of despair. This seems to concur with what Schneider (2011) proposes, that it is not merely meaning that people are seeking, but also the 'lift' of participation in something greater themselves. Denise reflects a similar sentiment of hoping to integrate her uplifting experiences of awe into her work with clients and in her personal relationships so she may help people to find inspiring moments in everyday life. To get through more challenging days, Carla relives moments of awe and accesses the feelings of being part of something larger than herself that cares. It appears that Carla's universe is not one that shows 'benign indifference' (Camus & O'brien, 1959) but rather she seems to see her relationship with the wider world as one that is caring, thus her existing worldview of a benevolent universe helps her to recall awe in a therapeutic way. What the participants seem to indicate is the experience of hope for better possibilities, whether for ways out of despair and suffering, or for inspiration. From Kierkegaard's point of view, hope is as crucial as despair in being human, and rather than being an act of escapism from reality it is an antithesis to despair and serves to orient and revitalise oneself towards possibilities (Fremstedal, 2020). Within the realm of psychotherapy, hope may play a foundational role in the therapeutic relationship be it in the form of the therapist holding hope for the client such as the case of Gloria or clients holding hope in their own process (Bartholomew et al., 2019; Larsen et al., 2007) Although the scope of this study does not enable a deeper exploration on how the uplifting nature of awe experiences translate into therapeutic hope, the participants' experiences and sense-making suggest a potential aspect of awe that is worth further investigation.

Another key sub-theme that emerged is the gratitude that participants feel along with a desire to do good for others and the wider world. Elizabeth, Carla, and Denise spoke about feeling a profound level of gratitude and a deeper appreciation for the world around them. Elizabeth, who has already adopted environmentally-friendly practices such as recycling, shared that awe experiences provided her with a deeper feeling of wonder and care for the planet. This seems to resonate with the 'Overview Effect' amongst astronauts as they reported greater affiliation and concern for the Earth and a consciousness to take action for the wellbeing of the Earth (Yaden et al., 2016). Similarly, Maslow's (1964) proposes that gratitude which comes with peak experiences often leads to an all-encompassing love for all and a desire to do good. Carla, who is aware of her privilege to experience awe, empathises with and feels protective about those who are more vulnerable and less privileged. Denise, who feels grateful and appreciative for her awe experiences, thinks about how to better her corner for the world and finds fulfilment in being a psychotherapist. Current literature that explores awe's impact on prosocial behaviour, points to concepts like self-diminishment and decreased self-importance (Bai et al., 2017) as well as the expanded concept of the self to include the values and aspirations of others (Perlin & Li, 2020). The participants in this study did not explicitly express a lower sense of self-importance, but rather highlighted their sense of gratitude and appreciation that seems to evoke a desire to do good for the wider world. The greater empathy and compassion for people beyond the immediate the experience of awe resonates more with Jiao and Luo's (2022) finding that increased feelings of connectedness and empathy in awe relates to prosocial

tendencies. For example, Carla remembers her adopted daughter's birth mother and extends well-wishes to her on her birthday with a hope that she knows how well her daughter is doing. Perhaps a self-awareness of one's own privileges along with empathy for others may contribute to a desire to do good for others. Having said that, awe does not only serve to promote prosocial tendencies and a desire to contribute to others, as some participants such as Anna and Elizabeth have also felt more motivated in their spiritual pursuits and there is a sense of revitalization.

From the life-span perspective of Erik Erikson (1950) in which he highlights the tension between generativity and stagnation in middle adulthood, awe experiences seem to inspire generativity amongst participants as they are motivated to engage with and contribute to the world. Supporting the well-being of others may benefit one's own well-being and generative contributions as well as expected future contributions indicate a positive effect on life satisfaction in middle to late adulthood (Grossman & Gruenewald, 2017). The study's findings indicate that awe experiences are not only therapeutic to the individual, but also seem to encourage empathy, affection, and appreciation for the world around them that translates to a wish to contribute to its betterment.

### **6.3 Discussing Theme III: The psychological facilitators of awe**

Participants were asked about the factors that they thought to have facilitated their experience of awe. A large majority of participants shared that being present and attentive to the world around them as a contributing element. Being present was

referred to by some participants as a mental state of not being distracted, neither ruminating nor projecting into the future, and being situated in the present time and space. Presence and focused attention may also be understood through the concept of absorption which refers to the extent to which one gets fully immersed in the experience. In a study by Van Elk et al. (2016), researchers found a tendency to get absorbed in the external stimuli may predispose people to experiencing awe. Their findings indicate that one's level of absorption can be increased by actually intending to get absorbed, and that feelings of awe may be suppressed if one adopts a more analytical mindset instead of allowing oneself to be absorbed by the awe-inducing stimuli. Being absorbed and present in the moment also resonates with literature that distinguishes awe and wonder, where researchers find that wonder evokes cognitive engagement to understand and to derive insight, while awe involves more direct perception, allowing the phenomenon to unravel (Darbor et al., 2015; Weger & Wagemann, 2018). Some participants shared experiences that concur with the idea of being intentionally present and absorbed. Anna's presence was described as an intention to be there with the person she was meant to be with (e.g. a client), suggesting a focused attention on the other. The intentionality of being in the present to the other was also echoed by Elizabeth, for whom a regular practice of meditation and mindfulness supports her to pay attention to the objects around her and to perceive them as they are with a clarity of mind.

In a recent study by Garcia-Campayo et al., (2022), it was found that the proportion of individuals who reported having at least one peak experience was significantly higher

amongst meditation practitioners than those who did not, suggesting that the practice of meditation, which encourages non-dual awareness, supports the access of transcendental experiences. This seems to be the case with Elizabeth, whose experiences awe and wonder frequently in ordinary living through daily mindfulness and meditation practices. This brings to light differing viewpoints about whether awe experiences can be accessed or created. Maslow (1962) opines that peak experiences cannot be created at will, while Wilson (1972) thinks that peak experiences and the experiences of connectedness and meaningfulness of reality can be conditioned to happen regularly since consciousness is intentional while on the contrary, absent-mindedness and taking things for granted gives way to a life that is lower in vitality and purpose. Schneider (2017) thinks that even if awe experiences were to be neurologically activated at will through mechanistic means, such means-to-an-end approaches would not capture the subtleties and multifarious nature of awe experiences, though he believes that awe-based consciousness can be cultivated by the individual by developing our own sensitivities towards living with more attention and other factors described in Section 2.5. What the participants reveal in this study seem to concur with the idea that awe and connectedness can be evoked with more intentionality. Being present and attentive to the world and engaging our consciousness in an active and immersive way facilitates and attunes us to experiences of awe. Carla, for example, thought that she would not have experienced awe at the cottage if she had merely glanced at her environment and emphasised that she was appreciating the beauty of her surroundings, and in her active appreciation she had an encounter with awe. Similarly, Denise shared that having awareness of herself and her

surroundings was a path towards finding awe and connectedness, in contrast to overlooking things around her and going through the motions as if on autopilot. Participants in this study illuminate a significant factor that contributes to awe experiences- our attentive awareness of the world around us can open the way to finding awe even in the mundane and the familiar. This also resonates with Schneider's (2009) view that awe can be more easily accessed if we can look at the world around us through the lens of intricacy, appreciating and being observant to the complexities and subtleties that might otherwise be overlooked.

In addition to being present and attentive, it appears that the capacity to hold and manage challenging emotions plays a part in being able to experience awe. Fiona, who experienced some anxiety about her daughter's performance in the concert, engaged in helpful self-talk that regulated her anxious feelings, which may have otherwise overwhelmed her. She attributed this to her maturity and believes that in her younger years she would not have developed the capacity to regulate her feelings. Beatrice and Denise also shared similar views and credited their openness and ability to ride the highs and lows of emotions as a factor in being able to experience awe. As awe experiences can be intense and complex with multiple feelings occurring at the same time (e.g. anxiety and amazement), being able to accept and embrace the totality of the emotional experience seems to be important. Furthermore, the findings of this study had also revealed that being overwhelmed is a common experience of awe. Maslow (1962) proposes that people who do not have peak experiences reject them with a narrow rational attitude that defends against losing control and being flooded with

emotions. What the participants share seems to concur with the idea that being able to accept and feel strong emotions play a part in facilitating the experience of awe. However, contrary to being ‘flooded’ by emotions and losing control, the participants’ experience with emotions seem to resonate with Schneider’s point that there is a significant difference between “being mobile in one’s relations to feeling and being paralyzed.” (2009, p.168) Had Fiona been paralyzed by her anxieties during the concert, she might have missed the experience of being awed by the band’s impressive teamwork, or had Beatrice been overwhelmed and stuck in the feelings of grief and loss at the memorial, she may have missed the other aspects of the concert which was to celebrate life.

Openness as a factor extends beyond being open to emotions to include openness to experiences. Quantitative research by Dong and Ni (2019) suggests that openness to experience and extraversion may invite more experiences of awe and subjective well-being, and that openness to experiences and awe require cognitive flexibility. Many participants described or alluded to openness as a factor that contributed to their experience of awe. For example, Denise followed her intuition to take a different turn down an otherwise well-trodden and familiar trail which led her to the awe of a deer sighting and a moment of connectedness with a butterfly. Beatrice heeded a felt sense of wanting to be there at her friend’s concert and changed her plans to make it happen. Openness to experiences in these instances also meant being curious about their intuitive nudges and being flexible and spontaneous to choose a different path that was originally planned, leading to the possibilities of surprise and awe.

In addition to being open to new experiences, Annie and Gloria described a form of openness that seemed to relate to a suspension of their own desires or impulses to act, thus openness in this sense involves a willingness to let things unravel and happen. Similarly, Elizabeth noticed that she did not have a desire to control how things were happening and felt peace. They described being present and open to the phenomena of awe that were unravelling before them and allowed things to unfold without their active involvement. They seemed to stress a state of non-doing similar to Weger and Wagemann's (2018) description of respect for the natural course of events that were unfolding in their phenomenological inquiry of awe. Gloria's experience of awe was set in the context of an extremely close encounter with the wild elephant and she had earlier described retreating backwards in the "presence of this incredible beast" to watch it from a distance, suggesting respect for the elephant and acknowledgment of the potential danger and unpredictability of being with a wild animal in its native habitat. Being open and non-intervening to phenomena seems to be resonant with the Taoist philosophy of effortless action ('wu-wei') which may be understood as being engaged without unnecessary interference and being in harmony with the nature of things (Xing & Sims, 2012). This also echoes Maslow's (1962) views on peak experiences that parallel awe. He points out that most peak experiences are receptive phenomena that "invade the person and he must be able to let them" (pp.17), further adding that one can neither force, grasp, nor strive for them, but instead let things unravel. The receptive state of non-doing may also relate to what researchers find to be the difference between awe and wonder- where involves more direct perception and



is less cognitively active than wonder, though awe may often lead to subsequent wondering and processing of the experience. (Darbor et al., 2015; Gallagher et al., 2015; Weger & Wagemann, 2018)

Another factor related to openness to experiences is the inclination or a desire to experience, as some participants described a willingness and even yearning to experience awe and connectedness with people. Beatrice and Gloria reflected a yearning for deeper human connection and experiences that encourage that, and Gloria's longing to return to oneness with other people and an inclination towards transcendental experiences have led her to consciously seek out adventurous and risk-taking trips in the physical (e.g., mountains) and spiritual (e.g. retreats) realms of existence. Carla also described an aching for the experience of absolute peace that she finds in moments of awe. The inner leaning towards and willingness to experience awe is perhaps what facilitates participants to seek for it and to be more attuned with the experience. However, the inner inclination towards awe experiences may not necessarily be related to the desire to have those experiences, as Elizabeth for example does not seem to purposefully seek out awe-inducing experiences, but rather appears to experience it frequently, which she credits regular meditative practices for. From a quantitative perspective, researchers have developed a way to measure dispositional awe, which indicates one's latent tendency to experience awe (Shiota et al., 2006) and consists of statements such as 'I seek out experiences that challenge my understanding of the world' and 'I have many opportunities to see the beauty of nature.' While these measurements allow one to capture the surface indicators of people who

tend to experience awe, what this study has shown is the possible underlying motivations for some people may choose to seek out these experiences- to feel moments of profound peace, to feel oneness through transcendence, or to experience authentic connection with people. Understanding the experiences and motivations of why people seek out awe experiences allows us to see that the tendency or disposition towards awe is perhaps not only about identifying a set of characteristics that people identify with. Instead, there are meaningful feelings and values that people connect with in their awe experiences which influence how and why they seek out awe in the world.

Furthermore, many participants also shared that having available time and space in their lives, and not being overly busy, has enabled them to experience awe. Carla, who has retired from work, credits having time in her schedule that permits her to slow down and be more appreciative. Denise shared a similar viewpoint and added that it was not only time, but also having a sense of inner space within herself to be able to appreciate experiences and discern them as special and not just another mundane occurrence. Conversely, she would have a more difficult time accessing awe if she was busy and tired, which also manifests as an embodied feeling of being 'congested'. This seems to point to a paradox that while awe may be able to uplift and expand one's awareness and experience of the world, an unhurried attitude with sufficient psychological capacity may be needed in order to pay attention to the moment. Fiona and Elizabeth also pointed to taking time to allow the mind to come to a stillness and to evolve along with the experience. The participants' experience of requiring time and space resonates

with the observation that Weger and Wagemann (2018) made, where they noted that 'time and inner readiness' were required, and that stress and inner pressure were 'hostile' to the experience of awe. It is worth wondering if the pace and context of modern urban living does pose as a hostile environment to experiences of awe as it seems that technological advances have come along with demands for people to be ever more productive and efficient and attention spans have reduced on globally with more to focus on and less time to do so (Lorenz-Spreen et al., 2019). However, as Schneider (2019) expresses, it is in the age of rapid technological and robotic revolution in which awe is ever more pertinent. Schneider (2019, p.125) calls us to make a decision between letting the robotic age be an 'awe-inspiring dawn' or a 'dehumanising nightmare', pointing out how it is up to humankind to decide if technological conveniences can liberate our time to connect with one another and pursue exploration and creativity, or if our minds and lives would instead be further narrowed by letting technology isolate us from one another and deprive us from exercising our imaginations. Learning from the participants that space and time are facilitators of awe experiences and contextualising it in the socio-cultural zeitgeist of the present day underscores the need to be aware and agentic about the way we pace our lives and to be mindful of how hostile or nurturing our ways of living are to our wellbeing.

Another factor that was explored was how age may influence ways of experiencing and making sense of awe. I had chosen to interview participants between 35 to 65 years of age as this is a life stage where people may be concerned with generativity and stagnation (Erikson, 1950), and themes of awe and connectedness may be of

relevance as it relates to the opening up of new possibilities and engagement with the wider world. Some participants noted that the actual experience of awe had remained the same throughout their lives, while others thought that maturity with age and life experience has helped them to be more emotionally open and present to the experience. Fiona believes that in her younger years, she was less able to regulate her anxieties and that would have overwhelmed her whereas she has a better handle over her feelings. Beatrice experienced a greater capacity to hold and experience difficult emotions like grief in her maturity, which she would not have been as open to as a younger person. She attributed her personal and emotional growth to consciously creating a life and environment that supports emotional experiences, including how her intensive training to be a psychotherapist has also contributed to her capacity to feel and to be connected herself. Both Carla and Fiona also reflected on how in their youth they were much more preoccupied with how other people perceived them and less attuned to their own internal experiences, suggesting that an externally oriented focus is perhaps less supportive than a more inward and introspective approach when it comes to experiencing awe and connectedness. Although emotional maturity and capacity may be related to one's chronological age, it appears that what is fundamentally at play here is how one relates to emotional experiences and the extent to which one can hold conflicting or challenging emotions. Beyond being open to one's emotional experiences, which was a factor discussed earlier, maturity involves an element of having developed a more nurturing attitude towards oneself. Elizabeth for example believes that the characteristics of awe are felt and experienced the same way at present as they have when she was younger, but the suffering and life challenges that

she had encountered over the years have brought her to pursue a more spiritual way of living that has since introduced more awe and wonder into her life. This is perhaps resonant with many of Schneider's (2009) interviewees who have developed awe as an attitude towards life after having gone through significant challenges.

On the topic of maturity as it relates to one's stage in life, Carla and Gloria also raised differing points of view. Carla reflected on how material security at retirement has afforded her leisure, time and the insight that appreciating life matters more than material pursuits, and consequently she experiences awe more easily in her later years and is revitalised. On the contrary, Gloria has adopted a more conservative lifestyle in her later years, choosing to focus on material security over adventure, and consequently having less enjoyment and fewer awe experiences than in her youth. Although both participants relate their experiences to their own stages in life and maturity in years, it seems that it is the way of life, more than chronological age itself, that influences how often one experiences awe. Gloria has over the past decade curbed her "*impulsive fun*" in place of a more dutiful "*put your head down and try to make some money, work hard*" (Gloria: 611) approach which she finds less awe-inspiring. This can be understood from Kierkegaard's lens of living in the tension between the necessary and the possible, the finite and the infinite (Kierkegaard et al., 1980). One may be lost in the infinite possibilities where nothing becomes actualized or be lost in the finite and necessary where one sees no possibilities for oneself. Gloria's focus on the necessity and materiality of existence has meant that she has turned her focus away from exploration to a more dutiful way of life with respect to material security, though that has

not completely cut off awe experiences for her. As Gloria's experiences of awe tend to involve intense and adventurous experiences that seem opposed to the approach of being more duty-bound, perhaps it is more difficult to sustain or facilitate awe experiences. On the other hand, one may wonder if an adventurous lifestyle is necessary as it is also possible to experience awe and connectedness in more ordinary experiences as depicted by a few other participants, much like Maslow's (1971) 'plateau-experiences' that are less intense but more sustainable and accessible. Cleary (1996) illuminates the difference between peak and plateau experiences, stating that both involve a receptivity towards one's surroundings, though plateau experiences entail a receptivity to both the extraordinary as well as the ordinary, the exceptional and the common. In a paradoxical fashion, the miraculous nature of the world is accepted as ordinary (Cleary & Shapiro, 1995) and one can see the miracle within the ordinary.

In addition, the participants' reflections raise interesting questions about the relationship between awe and maturity. It is often thought that children frequently experience awe and amazement at the world as they navigate a world of novelty, though empirical research on awe amongst children is lacking (Prade, 2022). On the other hand, the findings of this indicate that maturity that is gained from emotional and psychological development play a role in their experiences, either directly through better acceptance and regulation of complex feelings, or indirectly through adopting attitudes and ways of living that are more conducive to awe experiences. Perhaps, what is suggested from these findings can be related to the different types of awe, relating to what Schneider (2017) describes as "quick-boil" form of awe that comes in the form of spectacular

sights that amaze us with grandeur versus the “slow-simmer” form that comes with struggles and life experiences. Without the fresh eyes and spirit of youth, when awe is no longer as obvious or as easily felt, perhaps more conscious effort is required to acknowledge and appreciate the beauty and wonders of life’s offerings. As reflected by Denise, one needs “*enough wherewithal to kind of appreciate those experiences or be able to distinguish them from what is otherwise like a pretty regular day*” (Denise: 1173). Although Denise was referring to the idea of making time for experiences, it is not only time but the ability to discern the specialness within the mundane that invites awe. One may have plenty of time and adopt a slower pace of life but instead finds boredom or frustration instead of awe. On a similar note, finding awe and celebrating life in the midst of grief like what Beatrice has done requires the ability to comprehend nuances and to hold the delicate balance between joy and suffering, life and death, which requires a level of maturity in facing life’s existential givens.

The experience of awe as it relates to maturity can also be seen through the lens of Kierkegaard’s (1987) stages of life- the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious. In the aesthetic stage, pleasure takes centre stage and the individual relates primarily to themselves, seeking novel experiences and beauty. In the ethical stage, one assumes the responsibilities that they believe are necessary and important and seeks to dutifully fulfil their roles. In the ethical stage, one considers the impact of their actions on others and pays more attention to the good of the world around them than their own personal gains. However, this may come at the cost of their own self-exploration and spiritual growth. In the religious stage, one lives not with pleasure nor duty as their guiding

principle, but faith in God, and in the leap of faith the need for rationality is transcended which enables one to embrace even the absurdities of life. The findings of this study seem to indicate that the stage at which one is in life may play a role in how awe is experienced and accessed. In the aesthetic stage, this may come through an eager exploration of the world in search of novel experiences, such as Gloria and Carla's adventures and travels in their youth. In the ethical stages where one is preoccupied with fulfilling duties to society and to other relationships, awe may be less accessible, much like how Denise described feeling too 'congested' to feel awe when she was in a work-intensive phase of her life. In the religious stage, awe experiences may appeal more to one's spiritual dimension and comes through a process of interacting with the world and reflecting upon one's own perspectives and attitudes. Faith was expressed through the participants' feelings of being part of something bigger than themselves that transcended their need for rational explanations, where some participants who already had spiritual and religious beliefs were affirmed and strengthened in their faiths. Rather than rejecting their experiences that went beyond rationality, they allowed themselves to be moved and to be challenged. Velichkov (2019) draws parallels between Kierkegaard's leap of faith and sublime experiences but makes a distinction where the former can be evoked through self-reflexivity and involves grappling with paradoxical forces. The experiences of awe in the religious stage may differ from that in the aesthetic stage, where the former involves some psychological maturity and requires less novel simulation while the latter may be sought through more active pursuit of new adventures. Having said that, the two are not necessarily mutually



exclusive nor are the stages determined by chronological age as one may have a religious and spiritual experience of awe in the search for pleasure.

#### **6.4 Discussing Theme IV: The conceptualisation of awe- how awe is perceived**

Towards the end of the interview, participants were asked about what it was like to reflect and share about their experiences and to express anything else that they would like to add about how they saw awe. I had hoped that this would invite participants to share how they had conceptualised awe at a broader level beyond their individual experiences, as well as how they had felt about speaking about awe. What emerged seemed to point to the paradoxical nature of awe. Many participants described how difficult it was to put their experiences into words and how vast the concept of awe was, and yet at the same time it has helped them to make sense of their experiences and to share reflections that are otherwise not commonly talked about in daily life. Gloria thought it was awkward and a struggle to put her experiences in words and simultaneously thought that the invitation to reflect on her awe experiences has helped her to 'harvest' (Gloria:716) the moments, enabling her to gain new perspectives about her life as discussed in Section 5.2. Beatrice, whose interview was conducted soon after her experience of awe at the memorial concert, thought that speaking about it helped her organise and make more sense of the experience. Beatrice described awe with visual metaphors (e.g. a darkened theatre, a cloud) at the beginning of the interview and returned to enhance the visual representation of awe towards the end of the interview, indicating that awe is always present with everyone. Seeing how describing awe can be challenging, it might have been illuminating to invite participants

to also use other forms of expression (e.g. art, visual metaphors, movement metaphors) in addition to their verbal descriptions. I will further discuss this possibility in the following section about researcher reflexivity. Maslow (1962) describes peak experiences as being “ineffable” and not communicable by rational and verbal language but opines that the ineffability of these experiences has been overstated. He proposes that these experiences can be talked about if the parties in communication have had experiences and if people are able to speak poetically and be open to metaphorical ways of thinking and feeling. This resonates with the findings as the phenomenological approach in the interviewing process allowed participants to describe their own subjective experiences richly with the use of their own metaphors.

The notion of awe being accessible and available to everyone was shared amongst many participants, even if it seems like a somewhat indescribable phenomenon. Awe may be ‘big’, but it can be experienced in the smaller things in life and in the everyday, as Elizabeth and Denise described. It may not require novelty or grand vistas, as one can have a spiritual moment in one’s own garden as Carla does. What many participants share about awe being accessible and available may seem contradictory to the view that awe is an uncommon and almost rare experience. However, the accessibility of awe does not guarantee its regular occurrence. If awe was indeed accessible to everyone, what makes it uncommon? Elizabeth believes that the beauty of this world and the happiness we need is present for us, but we do not see it through our filters, while Carla thinks that being disconnected from the planet makes it difficult for one to feel awe. The factors that facilitate experiences of awe and connectedness

have been discussed in Section 6.3. As participants share their conceptualization of awe, what emerges in their discussion seems to reveal the awe as an experience that appears paradoxical, one that spans across polarities. Above and beyond what the participants express about awe at the end of the interview, I thought about the paradoxical nature of awe that has peppered throughout the interviews, from how it is experienced, what facilitates awe, to the impact that it has. The table below aims to consolidate and juxtapose the seemingly paradoxical themes that have been discussed thus far in addition to my understanding of how these opposites can be interpreted.

*Table 3: The paradoxes of Awe*

<b>Paradoxical themes</b>		<b>Understanding</b>
Accessible and available	Requires attention and presence	Awe experiences are accessible to everyone, but in order to perceive them we need to be attentive and present to ourselves and our surroundings.
Connectedness	Solitude	Awe experiences allow us to feel deeply connected to the world even in solitude.
Oneness	Separateness	In awe, we may feel oneness with the world while recognizing our separateness and individuality.
New perspectives	Familiarity	Awe experiences can open new perspectives for us even amid the most familiar contexts.
Transcendental	Ordinary	Awe transcends the ordinary and yet can be experienced in the ordinary.
Bigger than self	Expansive	We become aware that there is something bigger than ourselves and we may aware of our smallness, but it is an expansive feeling.
Open to emotions	Ability to regulate emotions	To experience awe, we need to be open to our emotions and also to know how to manage emotions that may be challenging.
Overwhelming	Peace and stillness	In awe, we may find peace and stillness in the midst of an overwhelming experience.

In the pursuit of understanding awe through lived experiences, what emerges in the process is the acknowledgement and embrace of paradoxes which highlights the complexity and richness of the phenomenon. Van Deurzen (2015) talks about the central role of paradox in human existence, stressing the importance of grappling with the polarities of life.

*‘Our search for understanding will always be frustrated, but paradoxically it is when we reach that limit that we find back the mystery of life, which connects us to a sense of awe and wonder.’* (Van Deurzen, 2015, p.34)

In his discussion of how awe in the world of artificial intelligence and great technological leaps, Schneider (2019) goes further and advocates that what truly distinguishes human from nonhuman existence, is not reflexive consciousness or even the capacity to experience human emotions but rather the uniquely human ability to grapple with and hold paradoxes.

*‘Such paradoxes include the sliver of fear in a loving relationship, or the hint of sorrow in a moment of glee, or the taste of envy in the most admiring friendships; and it is many more, delicately subtle combinations that lend life its zest, its pathos and its intensity.’* (Schneider, 2019, p.26)

Carla’s acknowledgement of loss and gain, privilege and suffering, Beatrice’s experience of unapologetically grieving and celebrating a life lost, and Elizabeth’s

profound sense of awe and amazement of the ordinary spoon- these are some examples of the multitude combinations of paradoxes that come alive in awe. Awe's complexity invites us to embrace paradoxes, to not be limited to one-dimensional feelings, but to be open to being challenged in our worldviews, to feel the comfort of stillness amidst apparent chaos, connection even in solitude, and unity even as we recognize our separateness.

It also does not come as a surprise that through analysing and evaluating the findings about the experiences of awe, that the exploration itself is also imbued with the same sense of complexity and mystery. Despite my efforts to contain the exploration with structure, awe seems to find a way to expand beyond the containers and parameters that I set upon it, provoking more questions even as it reveals some answers. In the next section, I will summarise the discussion in this project as well as critically evaluate the research process and its contributions to research and practice of psychotherapy.

## **6.5 Summary**

The discussion thus far has sought to examine and understand the four Group Experiential Themes that were revealed in the findings through referencing relevant theories and research studies on the topic. Seven participants' experiences of awe and the ways in which they have made meaning of their experiences have been compared, contrasted, and further interpreted by myself as the researcher in line with the double-hermeneutics stance of IPA. While participants have different encounters and contexts

of experiencing awe, the focus was on how they have experienced it, be it physiologically or psychologically.

Group Experiential Theme revealed the common characteristics of the immediate experiences of awe. Participants find that awe challenges what they know, comforts them even in the midst of the unknown, and connects them to the larger world of people, nature, and beyond. These qualitative characteristics were discussed and situated in the context of what emerging awe research has contributed from the experimental laboratories as well as broader theories of peak experiences and existential thinking.

Group Experiential Theme II focused on the impact and influence of awe experiences on participants beyond the immediate moments of awe. Some participants perceived changes in their perspectives that have long-lasting effects on their life philosophies and are able to draw upon the therapeutic aspects of their awe experiences in challenging times when hope and connectedness are needed. Echoing many quantitative research studies, their awe experiences have also ignited empathy and a desire to contribute to the world. The discussion gives voice to how people may make sense of their awe experiences in ways that inform their worldviews, providing nuance and insight to a landscape of mechanistic quantitative studies that focus on short-term psychological processes of manufactured awe experiences.

The third Group Experiential Theme uncovered the factors that may facilitate or contribute to one having awe experiences. The findings revealed a slightly greater focus on personal psychological factors (e.g. one's state of mind) over external circumstantial factors of the stimuli (e.g. how large the elephant was) and the discussion explored the role that a person's psychological state has on how one experiences awe.

The concept of awe and how participants perceived the experience of thinking and speaking about it was broadly discussed in Group Experiential Theme IV. The complex nature of awe experiences and paradoxical characteristics have also been highlighted in this section and explored with reference to existential thought.

## **6.6 Methodological Considerations and critical reflections**

### **6.6.1 Strengths and Limitations**

A large proportion of research studies on awe has been quantitative in nature, where participants' responses are measured upon being given what may be considered awe-inducing stimuli (e.g. images or videos of nature). In the qualitative realm, there has been a first-person phenomenological inquiry (Weger & Wagemann, 2018) into the experience of awe and a reflexive thematic analysis of students' experiences of being in the Arctic wilderness (Løvoll & Sæther, 2022). This research study has sought to contribute to the under-researched area of lived experiences of awe with the use of IPA. In this study, the context of awe was neither stimulated nor restricted to a singular experience or event, thus allowing the findings to capture nuances and depth that come

from real-life experiences of awe. The study acknowledges that the experience of awe can happen in multifarious ways and broadens the scope of possibilities that go beyond being awe-inspired by majestic settings in nature. There is an overall breadth and expansiveness as the study has a very wide scope. The initial intention of the study was to explore awe experiences with an added focus on feelings of connectedness that are described in literature. While this was explicitly explored with the participants, what came through in the participants' sharing revealed broader themes that flowed and interconnected with other aspects of the experience.

Furthermore, the study has also provided insight on the impact of awe experiences beyond the immediate term with an exploration of how participants have made sense of their experiences and how their insights have come to inform their ways of seeing and being in the world. As the research does not impose the experience of awe and invites participants to reflect on their own lived experiences, the insights that emerged appear to be more personally meaningful and impactful.

Much of the current research on awe (Bai et al., 2017; Sturm et al., 2022; Yang et al., 2018) measure outcomes of based on feelings of awe that are evoked by commonly recognized characteristics such as vastness. This research project focused on exploring the potential psychological factors that facilitate the experience of awe and the findings reveal the inner mental and emotional conditions that are common to participants, such as presence of mind, awareness, and openness. The richness of description given by participants who have had impactful or frequent experiences of



awe emphasises the role that our subjective state of mind has, bringing to light the agency of the perceiver and highlighting that one's experience of awe is not only dependent on whether the object of perception meets the stereotypical characteristics of an awe.

The table below summarises the contributions and strengths of this study relative to the existing body of knowledge and shows how the findings further enrich and expand upon our current understanding of awe.

*Table 4: Strengths and Contributions to knowledge*

<b>Existing Research</b>	<b>This Study</b>	<b>Contribution to Knowledge</b>
Studies measure the change in emotional, mental, or behavioural states of participants after going through an awe experience (Bai et al., 2017; Prade & Saroglou, 2016; Yang et al., 2018).	Participants reflect on lived experiences and are given the platform to express their feelings and subjective perceptions with varying degrees of depth and personal interpretations.	Findings of this study reveal that awe can be felt with great complexity, contradictions, and nuance (e.g. simultaneous feelings of separateness and oneness, stillness and excitement), highlighting the paradoxical nature of awe and the polarities that can be experienced.

Participants are provided with the external conditions that can evoke awe (Løvoll & Sæther, 2022; Piff et al., 2015).	Study sought to understand the psychological states of the participants in their own experiences of awe, and what participants thought helped or hindered their experiences.	The outcomes tell us that our states of mind (e.g. being open and present) can play a significant role in our experiences of awe and that awe can be felt even without any external stimuli (e.g. vastness, novelty) commonly associated with awe.
Studies measure the mental and behavioural impact of awe experiences in the immediate to near term horizon (Rivera et al., 2019; Van Cappellen et al., 2012).	This research sought to understand how participants interpreted their experiences and continued to integrate them into their lives.	The findings help us to see the subjective and personal ways that awe experiences can leave a lasting imprint on one's way of living.

One limitation of the study lies in the sample of the research, where participants were women predominantly from culturally white Canadian and British backgrounds even though the research recruitment was open to all and did not specify gender or culture requirements. Studies have previously indicated differences in dispositional awe

between countries and also cultural variances in responses to awe experiences (Razavi et al., 2016). In addition, researchers have also found that awe may be experienced as a mixed emotion with more fear amongst Chinese participants than in American participants who experience awe as a more positive motion (Stellar et al., 2024), suggesting that current research of awe and understanding of awe is disproportionately skewed towards Western samples. Although this study specifically aimed to study awe experiences where fear is not a major component, a sample with participants from non-Western cultures who also experience a tinge of fear may yield more complex and nuanced findings. Furthermore, the sample consists of only female participants. A sample that also includes male or male-identifying participants may give us broader insights into how awe and connection may be experienced and interpreted.

The broad age range of the sample (35 to 65 years old) may also be considered a limitation of this study as it does not allow me to systematically investigate or understand more deeply how age impacts the ways in which people experience and integrate awe experiences into their lives. Though the original intent of the study was to capture insights of participants who are beginning to or in the midst of experiencing concerns around generativity and stagnation (see Chapter 4), it is possible that a narrower age scope may yield greater depth of knowledge as participants on the younger end of the spectrum (e.g. 35-45 years of age) may experience awe and apply their insights differently than participants on the older end of the spectrum (e.g. 55-65 years of age). On the other hand, it is also possible that chronological age in and of itself may not meaningfully increase the level of homogeneity in the sample. As noted

in Chapter 6.3, Gloria experienced less awe she had adopted a more conservative and less adventurous lifestyle in her more mature years while Carla experienced awe more frequently as retirement afforded her more time to enjoy her surroundings. Instead of relying solely on chronological age, Adams (2006) proposes a more dynamic way to look at human development and maturity, which is characterized by discontinuity, chance, being open to our experiences and reflecting upon them, and committing to our choices. Hence, by not overly narrowing the age range of the sample, the findings are able to reflect the insights of participants who have entered the phases of life that are concerned with issues of generativity and stagnation.

Although unintentional, a sub-segmentation had formed in the process of the research study. Four out of seven participants were psychotherapists who responded to a research recruitment advertisement posted on a psychotherapist mailing list. Although unintentional, this formed a homogenous sub- cluster within a small sample.

Participants who were therapists were more inclined to talk about the impact of awe and connectedness on their professional lives in addition to their personal lives, compared to other participants who made more references to their personal lives. Furthermore, even though all participants who were interviewed were articulate and had the vocabulary to express their thoughts and feelings, participants who were psychotherapists appeared more at ease or certain with describing their experiences in words. This may be attributed to the degree of familiarity and skill of expressing and verbalizing feelings and nuances. This study did not explore in-depth the experiences of awe amongst psychotherapists, and there is potential for further research that

focuses on therapists' experiences of awe and how it affects their professional and personal lives.

Another limitation that became apparent was the challenge that participants had in describing awe and transcendental emotions in words. Often, it seemed that participants were trying to capture effervescent and nebulous qualities and words seemed too concrete and simplified. During the interviews, I was able to see from the expressions of the participants and feel the intensity and poignancy of the moments as they reconnected with the feelings of awe, yet in the process of transcribing, even when I could make written notes of the non-verbal elements, it seemed inadequate. This is perhaps reflective of the nature of awe experiences. As a novice researcher, I am perhaps also limited by my own cautiousness and could have afforded to be more creative, possibly inviting the participants to use non-verbal expressions and metaphors (e.g. movement, art) to facilitate their reflections, though this would have been to pre-planned and thought through, using literature on creative and expressive arts research as a reference (Szto et al., 2005; West et al., 2022). I am also aware of being in the tension between being overly cautious with my analysis that could have been deeper and staying faithful to the participants' experiences. As a therapist, navigating this tension was made easier by having multiple sessions and building a relationship over time for my input to be directly challenged by the client. As a new researcher, the dilemma was challenging as I only had the interview hour. I navigated this by referring to not only the transcripts but also the audio recordings during the analysis stage so I

could re-immense myself in the participants' individual worlds, which helped me to stay grounded as my own ideas and insights emerged from my interpretations.

## **6.6.2 Validity and Quality**

### **Sensitivity to context**

Throughout the research process from interviewing to data analysis, particular attention was placed on exploring the unique context and experience of awe that each participant had. Participants were encouraged to share their narratives freely. The settings in which participants experienced awe varied from being in nature to the experience of collective grief, thus evoking a variety of emotions and expressions which I was mindful and sensitive to explore without pre-imposing what or how the experience of awe may emerge. Each individual interview was analysed as its own universe of data, in line with IPA's idiographic commitment. I was also aware that with some participants, I may have been one of very few people that they have spoken to so intently and extensively about their awe experiences, thus the way I question or paraphrase their responses may have an influence on their meaning-making process. Being sensitive to this, I was mindful of adopting an open and tentative approach when I attempted to clarify their responses.

In analysing the data, the findings that emerged were contextualised in relation to the existing knowledge and theories covered in the literature review and with research that was conducted later in relation to unexpected findings.

## **Commitment and rigour**

The undertaking of this research project involved significant commitment and rigour, beginning with defining the research question to the eventual analysis of the data. Considerable time was taken to investigate the current understanding of awe before understanding the scope in which this research project can undertake.

During the analysis stage, I remained committed to the individual experience even as commonalities were drawn out from emerging themes. I returned to the raw audio recordings and transcripts at various points and checked the verbatim to ensure that my interpretations and inductions are grounded in the participants' accounts. These processes required immersion and focus, thus self-monitoring of my own state of mind was important and I paused when my full attention could not be given to the task.

## **Transparency and coherence**

Each part of the research process has been described in detail with explanations about my thought process where relevant. Researcher notes were provided within the interview transcripts which reflect my questions and initial understanding of the participants' description and Chapter 4 shows the analysis process that was repeated with individual data set, as well as the way in which group themes were extracted. In addition, reflexive accounts were also offered throughout the process. I had also



sought feedback from two supervisors which helped to ensure that the analysis and discussion was robust.

### **Impact and importance:**

The impact and importance of this study will be discussed in the next section.

## **6.7 Significance and implications of the study**

### **Bringing depth, breadth, and nuance to a complex experience**

I will discuss the impact and importance by addressing the significance of the study and implications on the clinical practice of psychotherapy. Firstly, from the standpoint of contribution to research and knowledge, the study has provided insight into the experience of awe and connectedness in the participant group that quantitative researchers have attempted to simulate and measure in immediate and short-term settings. Awe's impact on pro-social behaviour and connectedness have been empirically measured in experimental settings and explained with psychological theories, yet there has not been a study that has captured the lived experiences and their impact on people's way of being and seeing the world. Qualitatively, a first-person phenomenological inquiry by Weger and Wagemann (2018) focuses on exploring the characteristics and attributes of awe and wonder. Schneider's 'Awakening to Awe' (2009), a collection of stories of his acquaintances whose lives have been transformed by adopting an awe-based attitude, is illuminating though it is not a research study.

Thus, this research project has shed light on a very human phenomenon and emotion

that remains qualitatively highly under-researched. By attempting to understand awe from a highly personal and intimate level, more depth and nuance is revealed. For example, Carla's experience of awe at meeting her daughter for the first time came with a bittersweet recognition of life's dualities and empathy for others. The complexity would have been easily missed by studies that primarily aimed to determine the psychological processes of awe by experimentally measuring its before and after impact.

The findings from this study also reveal awe to be a multi-faceted phenomenon that can challenge known perceptions of the world, comfort with feelings of peace, and to foster a sense of connectedness with the wider world even if awe was experienced in solitude. The practice of psychotherapy, in particular existential psychotherapy, encourages people to challenge sedimented ways of being (Spinelli, 2005) and learn to face existential anxiety which comes with the acknowledgement of our limitations and freedom (Van Deurzen, 2009) and to reflect on our relationship with the world in all aspects from the physical to the social and spiritual. The predominant stance of existential psychotherapy is one of cultivating wisdom and developing an introspective attitude towards life, and the view of the unknown is often thought of as anxiety-provoking. This study reveals the ways in which awe experiences that put us in touch with the unknown can also be profoundly expansive and moving, echoing what Schneider proposes as the 'thrill' and excitement of being engaged in something larger than the self and in the mystery of life. The lift and expansive nature of awe experiences puts a pause to our automated (Wilson, 1972) ways of living and invites us

to recalibrate our attitudes on living. By putting us in touch with what is beyond and bigger than ourselves, awe experiences bring our awareness to recognize the boundaries and limitations that we live in and challenges us to expand our sense of possibilities. Existentially speaking, our selves are not fixed, and we are continually in the process of becoming, thus awe experiences may serve as potent catalysts for change if the insights are reflected upon and integrated into everyday living. The findings of this study reveal the ways in which awe experiences can profoundly move us to reconsider or reaffirm our beliefs.

In addition, the study has brought attention to the complexity, breadth, and richness of awe experiences by not constraining participants to a particular type of awe. Many quantitative research studies on awe default to using scenes of nature or have participants have a relatively controlled experience in nature. By allowing participants to refer to their lived experiences, profound experiences with transformational impact could be discussed and reflected upon. Indeed, it would be nearly impossible to simulate Gloria's thrilling chance encounter with a wild elephant or Anna's experience of religious awe, yet these are moments that can leave a lasting imprint on one's consciousness that this study has aimed to understand. Having said that, the study also shows that it is not only once-in-a-lifetime experiences in the wild nor vast scenes of nature that can evoke awe and feelings of connectedness with the world. The findings indicate that awe can be felt in more ordinary settings of daily living, connectedness can be felt in solitude, and that awe can be experienced in a deeply relational way such as in Anna and Gloria's experiences of empathy with others in

group settings. Awe research has predominantly been focused on vastness and nature as elicitors, while this study reveals that awe can be evoked in a myriad of ways ranging from ordinary daily life to relational experiences with other people. Furthermore, this study is original in a sense that it highlights the paradoxical nature of awe that may not be as explicitly discussed in existing literature. As discussed in Section 6.4, the exploration and understanding of awe experiences in this study comes with an acknowledgement and an embrace of its complex nature. Awe may not be easily understood or explained, but far from it being elusive, awe demands us to be attentive to the subtleties of our existence and experiences. In doing so, just as participants of this study have demonstrated, awe can be experienced as grandeur even in the simplest and quietest moments.

### **Psychological facilitators of awe and connections with the therapeutic process**

This research project has also shed light on the factors that facilitate awe, which is yet another under-researched aspect of the phenomenon. Current research predominantly assumes particular characteristics of awe, such as vastness and novelty (Sturm et al., 2022; Yang et al., 2018) which are repeated characteristics that researchers use in experiment setups (e.g. images of space). Considerably less attention and exploration has been given to the psychological and emotional state of the individual that plays a significant role in our subjective experiences. The studies that do consider the psychological states of people have examined the likelihood or tendencies towards awe experiences from the lens of personality traits, suggesting that the likelihood of experiencing awe is linked to one's openness to experiences (Shiota et al., 2006). This

study, by uncovering in-the-moment states of the participants, allows us a glimpse of what being open to experiences or being attentive and present might look like, affirming our existential freedom to choose how we would like to interact with the world around us. Understanding the psychological conditions that facilitate awe experiences also acknowledges that we have agency over our experiences and that awe may not be an uncommon phenomenon that depends on chance or the characteristics of the object of awe. Even if awe experiences cannot be mechanised or re-created (Maslow, 1962), there are states of mind and ways of living that may help us to be more attuned to expansive states of awareness.

The practice of psychotherapy, particularly existential therapy, can play a significant role in addressing the factors that facilitate awe and beyond that, cultivating what Schneider (2009) terms as an awe-based consciousness and attitude towards living. It can be said that the therapeutic process consists of elements that overlap and resonate with the factors that were found to be facilitative towards awe experiences.

- A. Being present and attentive- Experiences of awe are more easily accessed when one is paying attention to both the world around them and their own perceptions and feelings that arise. The process is one of the cornerstones of therapy where the client is invited to explore and be attentive to how they relate to the world around them. Therapists may specifically hone in on this by introducing mindfulness techniques. This practice of being present to oneself and the world may be translated from the therapeutic hour into clients' daily lives.

- B. Openness - Openness to experiences and emotions play a role in experiencing awe. The practice of existential-phenomenological therapy involves adopting a phenomenological attitude of 'becoming inwardly empty, awake, and receptive' and embracing an 'inner and outer openness' (Längle & Klaassen, 2021). This stance is adopted by therapists in the therapeutic encounter with the hope of encouraging clients to take on a similar stance of openness and curiosity to their psychological and emotional world as well as the world they inhabit.
- C. Space and time- The participants' reflections highlight the importance of slowing down and being able to take their time in experiencing the world, as well as having sufficient mental and emotional capacity to appreciate and engage with the world. One of the key ingredients of therapy is to dedicate space and time in one's lives for the purpose of introspection and close attunement with the self and the other. Furthermore, existential therapy seeks to illuminate the ways in which we relate to our existence in space and time and brings awareness to the possibilities and limitations in our finite existence. In doing so, we may make choices in ways of living, including changing our pace and making space to be more present.
- D. Disposition and desire- Having an orientation towards and a desire for awe experiences play a role in influencing how much one seeks and finds awe in the world. How much one seeks and yearns for these experiences, and on the

contrary how absent awe is in one's life, are questions that are worth exploring in therapy as they may shine a light on what a person values or needs in the journey towards emotional growth and self-understanding.

- E. Maturity- In the context of this study, adults of middle adulthood were chosen as awe may be of interest in a life stage where themes of generativity and stagnation become more pertinent from the psychosocial point of view (Erikson, 1950). Maturity while related to one's chronological age and life experiences is also expressed by participants as the psychological and emotional capacity to hold and to process emotions that may be challenging or complex as one may experience in states of awe. The therapeutic process and relationship is one that encourages and develops this capacity, and in particular existential therapy calls for us to identify and to grapple with our tensions and paradoxes.

As the therapeutic process mirrors and complements the facilitators that help one to access awe as described above, it seems likely that awe may also be experienced within the therapeutic relationship between the therapist and client. Leitner (2001) proposes that awe can be experienced in a highly intimate relationship between people, and that the therapists' ability to navigate and balance closeness and separateness can promote profound life-changing experiences in therapy. He also highlights it is not only clients that may feel discomfort with being revered by the therapist, as therapists may need to face up to their discomfort of being regarded in awe by clients, potentially regarding it as idealisation and pathologizing the experience which may in turn

undermine the sense of awe that could have been acknowledged and held with clients. Hence, it may be beneficial for psychotherapists to examine their own relationship and experiences with awe and the intimate feelings of connectedness to others, as being aware of how one expresses and receives awe in relation to the other may open up new and deeper levels of connectedness with the client, resonating with Buber's (2020) 'I-Thou' way of relating.

Finally, the study has illuminated the potential benefits of reflecting about awe experiences, which is found to be not easy, but simultaneously helpful and the insights garnered from active reflection provide therapeutic value. Although awe, like other transcendental or peak experiences, are seen as "ineffable" (Maslow, 1962), there is merit in the attempt to speak and reflect about awe experiences, particularly in the presence of a therapist who is curious and invested in understanding the other. Existential isolation (Pinel et al., 2017; Yalom, 1980) proposes that we can never truly know the experience of the other and perhaps the difficulty of verbalising nebulous and complex experiences such as awe adds to the challenge and frustration. However, as the findings also suggest, there is relational depth and deep empathy that can be accessed that goes beyond verbal exchange and cognitive understanding (Cooper, 2005) and to reflect together with a therapist about the ineffable is a worthy pursuit to explore the limits of the human experience. Existential psychotherapists who are interested in the breadth and depth of the human experience may find it illuminating to reflect upon their own experiences with awe so that they may be more able to facilitate discussions and bring them into awareness as much as they do for other more common



emotional experiences like joy and disappointment. Maslow (1962) acknowledges that peak experiences can be described and communicated if both people have had experiences such and are able to speak in rhapsodic language. The findings of this study are understood and interpreted through my lens as somebody who has had experiences of awe and is open to metaphorical language. While the experiences of the participants have varied so greatly, some of which I have yet to or may never experience, empathy and genuine curiosity have enabled me to step into the experiences of participants as much as I could and to share in the emotions and thoughts that unfolded in their recounting. The psychotherapeutic space and relationship allow for difficult experiences to be reflected and talked about, though 'difficult' is often assumed to be that of suffering. This study encourages psychotherapists to consider the therapeutic value of facilitating reflections and curiosities about awe experiences that are very much part of our human existence, yet potentially under-discussed in ordinary living.

Psychotherapists may reflect upon their own relationship with awe and consider developing a greater awareness and sensitivity towards awe experiences in their lives. Contemplating on their own experiences of awe, consciously adopting some of the ways of being that have been discussed (e.g. being attentive and present even in familiar contexts, and being open to experiences and emotions) may deepen the therapists' own awareness and understanding of awe. Being more sensitive and familiar with awe and its paradoxes may allow therapists to better connect with the complexity and richness of clients' lives. As the participants in this study have shared,

grieving may be a celebration of life, gaining a child may mean feeling for the loss of another parent, and being in solitude may bring a moment of connection with the greater universe.

To further illustrate how awareness and sensitivity to awe may be helpful in a therapeutic setting, I will cite an example of a client who had experienced a stillbirth and was devastated. Part of her difficulty in the grieving process was the constant reassurance by family, friends, and well-intentioned healthcare providers that she could look forward to a 'healthy and successful' pregnancy. Rather than cheering her up, she felt very alone as these responses invalidated and dismissed the existence of her child, as if she should just move on to another pregnancy. She was admirably open and accepting of her grief and loss, and in one session shared how amazed she had been when she had entered the second trimester, beating the statistical odds that were presented to her by the doctors as the child had tested positive for a rare genetic mutation. I sensed a well of unexplored feelings and thoughts and nudged her to speak more about it. Her eyes lit up as she passionately described how proud she was that her child had made it so far along, and how he had the same bushy eyebrows as her, a legacy passed down by her own father. She described him like a miracle that he was. In that moment I felt myself drawn by a sense of awe of his existence and that she was as much in awe as she is in pain over her loss. I reflected this to her, and in this opened the space to for us to tend to depths and breadth of her feelings. For once, she was not seen as merely a grieving mother who needed to be reassured of a 'successful pregnancy'. In that moment, we could celebrate a life that manifested, however briefly,

and she could express both her awe of existence that also came with grief, disappointment, and gratitude. Had I not been sensitive enough to awe, I may have only been able to tend to her sorrow and missed the richness of her experience.

## **6.8 Future Research**

The sample demographics for this research study included four psychotherapists who offered insight into how their experiences of awe and connectedness with the world have come to influence their personal and professional lives. Although the study did not specifically intend to study the experiences of awe amongst psychotherapists, the findings reveal potential areas of interest that are worthy of further exploration. Awe may be further studied in the context of psychotherapy, such as how therapists' experiences of awe influence their work and how awe may be experienced within the therapeutic relationship. In addition, awe in the relational context- being in awe of the other, may also yield insights pertinent to the practice of psychotherapy. Similarly, a study that explores clients' experiences of awe within the context of their therapeutic process and relationship would also be illuminating.

In addition, one of the reasons for choosing the sample of middle adulthood (ages 35-65 years of age) was the concerns and tension between generativity and stagnation that are faced in this phase of life. Although the findings suggest that awe has the potential to inspire empathy and connectedness and a desire to contribute to others, a deeper investigation may help us to understand more about how awe experiences are

harnessed and integrated by people who have translated their inspired moments into more lasting behavioural change.

Furthermore, the study has shown that how awe experiences may be accessed in more ordinary and mundane settings and are facilitated by one's state of mind (e.g. being present and open). Further research that explores the ways in which people can be encouraged to develop an awe-based awareness of the world may provide practical and therapeutic benefits.

This study has referred to predominantly Western or Eurocentric views and expressions of awe, and study participants are all women of North-American and European backgrounds. Existing research has provided indications on how there are cultural variance in the ways that awe is experienced, such as different dispositions towards positive and negative aspects of awe as well as the impact of awe on the sense of self (Bai et al., 2017; Nakayama et al., 2020; Razavi et al., 2016). In addition to the cultural backgrounds of participants, the relationship between awe and the individual's spiritual dimension or worldview may also be further investigated. In the present study, existing spiritual beliefs play a role in the ways that awe experiences are made sense of and integrated. For example, participants have alluded to God or the Universe or feeling oneness with the world. Although there was no assessment or pre-screening of participant's spiritual beliefs and values, the participants in this sample appear to be spiritually inclined and seem at ease with relating their experiences to their spiritual and religious beliefs and values. It may be interesting to discover how participants with more

materialist views or who are less spiritually inclined experience and make sense of awe. Furthermore, further research of how people of different cultures and spiritual beliefs interpret their awe experiences may add further breadth and contrast to the current body of knowledge that lean more heavily towards Euro-centric thinking influenced by Abrahamic faiths.

## **6.9 Reflexive Exploration**

This chapter was a challenge to engage with as I inevitably had to leave the world of excavating insights gleaned from the participants and presenting what I had found to discuss my findings vis-a-vis what was already present in the world. Although there was some excitement in the comparing and contrasting, there was also a certain amount of anxiety and dread- what if what I had found is not deemed as useful or interesting in the world of research and clinical practice? The anxiety even had a tinge of pre-emptive guilt that I had not done service to the participants' experiences or had this was somehow a futile exercise. Sitting with this emotional challenge, I realised that some of this anxiety was related to my own sense of disconnectedness with the world and a kind of imposter syndrome that had set in- *what kind of an awe researcher feels so awful about the state of the world?* Looking at the course of this research, I had found myself in an increasingly overwhelming world to navigate- the pandemic, mental health crisis, economic and cost of living crisis, and constant wars happening have evoked a kind of narrowing within me where I would like to desensitise myself more as a way to seek refuge- quite the opposite of the expansiveness of awe. Yet, there is still

a pull to not give up and to continue engaging with the work, and often it is the participant's voices and expressions as they talk about awe that remind me of the task at hand, and my own awe and gratitude of what has been shared has served as fuel and nourishment for my weary soul. In these moments, I remember that daunting as it is to engage with the discussion chapter, there is also a positive sense of relief that many people have been curious about what I am curious about and have gone to seek knowledge in different ways. This research project aims to contribute just one more drop of knowledge, it is part of a larger whole. This too can be full of awe, reverence, and recognition that I and this study are part of the larger whole. By acknowledging both the significance and the smallness of this project, I feel the anxiety alleviate and I can focus on the work at hand.

The process of writing the discussion also involved questioning the relevance to clinical practice. Perhaps synchronicity had come to my rescue, for during a period of turning away from writing, a client who had been deeply troubled by work turned up one session remarking about her trip to the Grand Canyon and how her experience of awe at the beauty and vastness of the world made her realise that there was so much more to life than fretting about her work stress. I held space for her awe as much as I did for her moments of anxiety and stress, and in the phenomenological exploration of her experience and meaning-making, I gained renewed appreciation for this study, its potentials and its limitations. At this point in my research, I am not here to proclaim the benefits of awe and evangelise about the revolutionary potential of awe in practice.

Rather, I am capturing the voices of those who have had these experiences, and in the process attempt to invite greater curiosity about this very human phenomenon.

## 7.0 Conclusion

The study set out with the aim of capturing the voices of people who have lived experiences of awe and connectedness with the wider world. Having had personal experiences of awe that piqued my curiosity, I was struck by the dearth of research studies that explored this phenomenon that seemed very present in religious texts. I wondered about how awe was experienced in today's context, what impact these experiences have on people, and what were the conditions that gave rise to these experiences.

The study's findings have been eye-opening in the sense that they reveal the complexity of the awe and how awe experiences often encompass many other feelings and can evoke meanings that go on to affect one's way of being in the world. The participants' experiences point towards awe experiences as being challenging of their existing beliefs and understanding with a sense of expansion to something greater than themselves; bringing about feelings of greater connectedness with the wider world including people and the physical and spiritual world; as well as more comforting feelings of peace and calmness. Beyond the immediate experience, participants have shared how they made sense of their experiences. This included having shifts in perspectives, feeling greater empathy for others and also wanting to contribute towards the betterment of the world, which speaks to the need for generativity in middle adulthood and beyond. The psychological conditions and states of mind that play a role in the experiences of awe have also been uncovered in this study, providing readers



with an understanding of awe that takes into account the inner environments that facilitate the experience of awe, and looking beyond the typical defining characteristics of the phenomenon (e.g. vastness, novelty). Taking a step back and looking at the concept of awe, it was also revealed that awe experiences were challenging to capture and put across in words by the participants even though they had mostly been articulate in their reflections. The ineffability of the experiences, however, did not seem to put off or deter them from thinking and talking about it, as some also found it therapeutic and helpful to do so.

This study has qualitatively examined the lived experiences of awe and has taken on a broad and exploratory view without putting constraints on the contexts or types of awe that can be experienced. Participants have thus brought forth various situations in which awe was felt, ranging from collective experiences in large groups to moments of solitude, from being in the great outdoors to the familiar settings of the home. This illuminates the possibility that awe-inspired living may be more accessible than one thinks. In addition, the input of participants who are psychotherapists also raises further curiosity about how awe experiences may play a role in the therapeutic process and relationship, which suggests that a more specific and deeper exploration could be a worthwhile endeavour.

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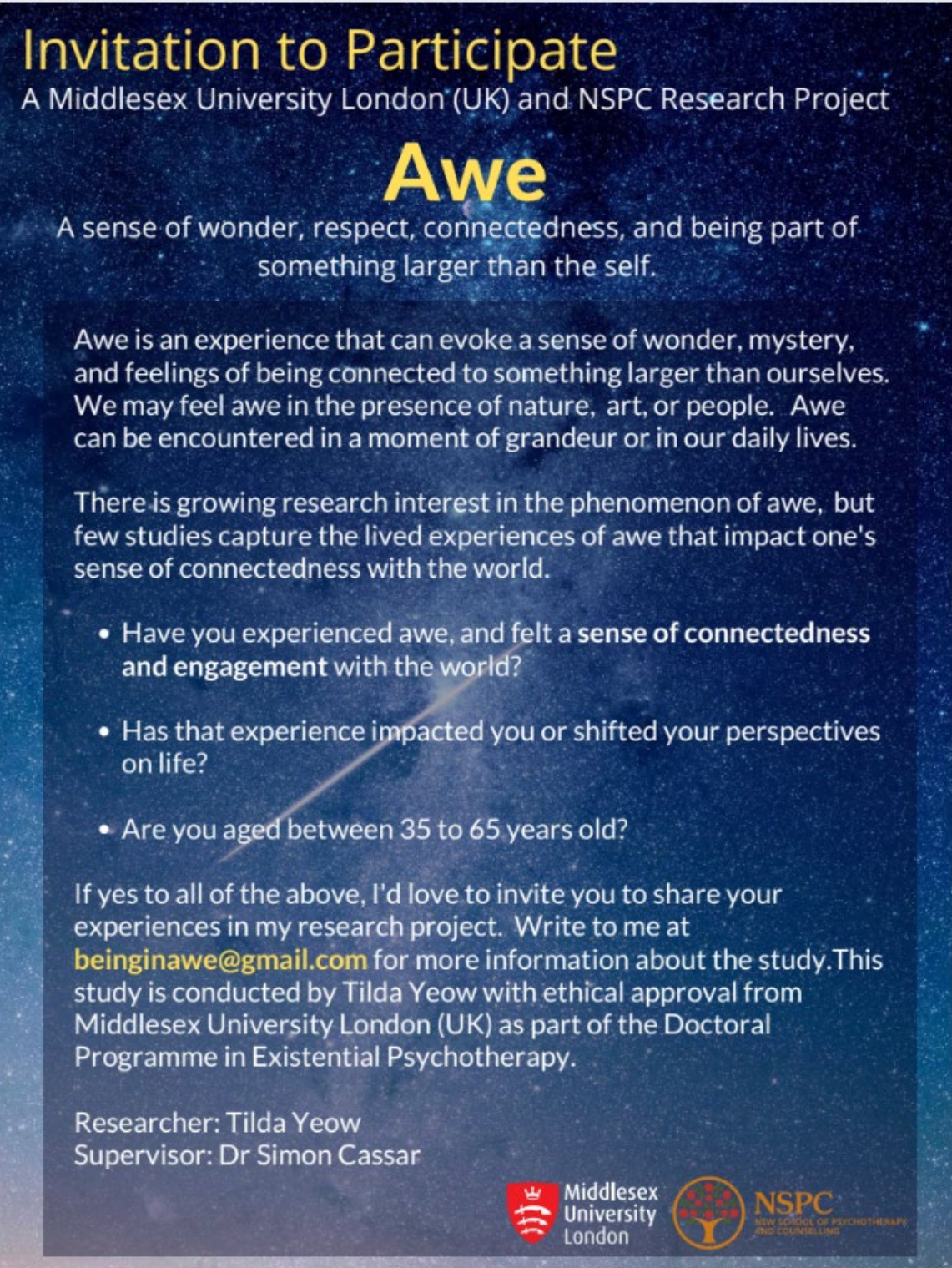
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## Appendix A: Recruitment Poster



# Invitation to Participate

A Middlesex University London (UK) and NSPC Research Project

## Awe

A sense of wonder, respect, connectedness, and being part of something larger than the self.


Awe is an experience that can evoke a sense of wonder, mystery, and feelings of being connected to something larger than ourselves. We may feel awe in the presence of nature, art, or people. Awe can be encountered in a moment of grandeur or in our daily lives.

There is growing research interest in the phenomenon of awe, but few studies capture the lived experiences of awe that impact one's sense of connectedness with the world.


- Have you experienced awe, and felt a **sense of connectedness and engagement** with the world?
- Has that experience impacted you or shifted your perspectives on life?
- Are you aged between 35 to 65 years old?

If yes to all of the above, I'd love to invite you to share your experiences in my research project. Write to me at [beinginawe@gmail.com](mailto:beinginawe@gmail.com) for more information about the study. This study is conducted by Tilda Yeow with ethical approval from Middlesex University London (UK) as part of the Doctoral Programme in Existential Psychotherapy.

Researcher: Tilda Yeow  
Supervisor: Dr Simon Cassar



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## **Appendix B: Interview Questions Guide**

- 1) Can you describe your experience of awe?

(prompt: when, where, how, thoughts, feelings, sensations)

This question aims to initiate a general description of the events or incidents of awe that had taken place. Further exploration and attention can be given to participants' feelings and thoughts as they experienced awe.

- 2) What did it feel like, to be connected to people/nature/world?

If and when participants talk about feeling connectedness, this question aims to go deeper into what and how that is being perceived.

- 3) What did it mean for you to be connected to people/nature/world?

This question may serve as a prompt to understand what meanings do participants derive from feelings of connectedness?

- 4) Since the experience, what has changed about the way you engaged with the world?

This question aims to understand the impact of their experiences on their worldviews.

5) How did the experience influence the way you live?

This is a similar question to the above to help participants expand on the topic.

6) Based on your experiences, what do you think are the factors that helped you to experience awe and connectedness?

This question aims to uncover what participants think have helped them to experience awe.

These questions do not have to be asked sequentially but serve as guideposts to help participants expand on the topic. Further prompts may help participants to explore their experiences of the phenomenon as that is the focus of the study. For example, if participants described feeling in awe of a painting, a prompts such as “what about the painting inspired awe?” or “what did awe feel like in that moment” can help to provide greater details.

## **Appendix C: Reflexivity Guide**

### **In what way might my experience shape my participation in the project?**

My own memorable experience of awe and connectedness was not a result of a grand event or sight, but rather it came after a period of emotional intensity with feelings of sadness and loneliness. While there was an 'acute' phase of feeling in awe, as if being part of and in the presence of something infinite, the days and weeks succeeding were imbued with moments of daily awe and gratitude while feeling connected with the world around me, including people, nature, and the train arriving on time.

This experience has made me curious about the phenomenon and eager to listen to and explore how other people make sense of awe and connectedness. Through my own experience and conducting literature review, it appears that awe and connectedness may be experienced in many different ways and influence people to differing degrees and in multiple aspects of life. This awareness allows me to be both excited and grounded in exploring phenomenologically with each individual.

Update: I did choose to interview a demographic that is older than I am (e.g. 35-65 years old, though I am crossing into the bracket while I do my research. Perhaps, there are encounters of awe that are unique to the life stages or depth and breath of life experiences that participants will have. I conducted my first interview with a participant who is in her 60's and who has experienced awe in contexts in which I would have felt quite differently, based on my own understanding of myself. I feel relieved by this difference that seems to fuel my curiosity and I am somewhat liberated from over-identifying with the participant.

### **What experiences have I had with qualitative research?**

My only experience with performing qualitative research was through conducting focus groups within the field of marketing. However, it was a commercial exercise rather than an academic one, and did not have the rigor of a formal study. Nevertheless, it gave me some experience and confidence in asking questions to probe and to understand within a short time frame.

### **What is my orientation to qualitative research?**

As a therapist practicing predominantly existentially, I find myself very aligned with the ethos of qualitative phenomenological research as I am more drawn towards understanding individual experiences rather than being able to generalize them. At the same time, I recognize that I am inexperienced and have reservations about interviewing with a therapist's hat as the phenomenological exploration takes place over a longer period of time while I only have an hour with the research participant. There are transferable skill sets that give me confidence and gaps which I hope to close with each new interview.

### **What results do I expect to come out of this project?**

At present, I have little expectations as to what I will find as I recognize that I have chosen a question that is still quite under-researched from a qualitative point of view. However, I do hope to get rich data that reveal common and unique characteristics of the experience and to understand how people may make sense of their individual experiences of awe.

Update: Although I am still open about what I would find, I noticed after analyzing my first interview that the subject is indeed very rich and if all my participants were to be as forthcoming and articulate, I would have on hand a lot of rich information which now feels quite daunting. I am expecting more out of myself to do justice to the contributions made than I am of results.

### **What theories do I tend to favour while analysing data?**

As I am adopting IPA as my methodology of choice, I am adhering somewhat closely to the updated guidelines and suggestions provided by the authors (Smith et al., 2022). At the same time, as I am researching from an existential perspective, I am also looking at the data through the lens of how a person's dimensions of existence are influenced and shaped through Emmy Van Deurzen's four worlds model (Van Deurzen, 2009). Existential writing and philosophies also influence the way that I interpret the data, along with other psychological perspectives of awe that I had encountered through literature review.

### **What is my stake in the research? What do I hope to get out of it?**

The study is for the purpose of my doctoral degree and in many ways it comes with high personal high-stakes. I do hope to have a robust experience of what it is like to form an inquiry and conduct qualitative research. Though I do not see myself being a researcher in the near future, I am interested in the phenomenon of awe and I am

open to discovering new knowledge that may be helpful in my practice of being a therapist and for my personal growth.

### **What are my fears?**

I am conscious of a level of anxiety that permeates my process as I worry that the expansive and nebulous nature of awe may be difficult for participants to put in words, and that I may be interpreting the data in a way that is too removed from what the participant's experience.

I was also initially afraid of not being able to recruit enough participants for the research, and that fear had held me back from pushing forward with the recruitment phase at one point. Reflecting further on that, I recognize that a significant part of that fear was about me not feeling like I know the right communities and channels to approach after an initial setback of not receiving any replies. My worries were assuaged when I tried again through a therapist directory and personal contacts.

In addition, I generally worry about not being able to complete the study in a reasonable time frame and losing motivation and dedication amidst other life demands. I have found the freedom of individual research to be both enjoyable and also difficult to navigate given that it is quite a solo journey that requires a lot of self-motivation and direction.

Update: I conducted a second screening interview still with the mindset that it would be difficult to get participants. I noticed myself taking on a position of trying too hard to 'convince' the potential participant, who had started to express her doubts and disinterest in participating in an academic study, after showing initial enthusiasm. I realized how this narrative in my mind has not been helpful, and decided to advertise again, which was something I avoided for fear of not getting a response. With great relief, I had a much better response this time.

## Appendix D: Ethics application and risk assessments



There are now **7 Data Protection Principles**, which states that information must be:

1. Fairly and lawfully processed;
2. Processed for specified and lawful purposes;
3. Adequate, relevant and not excessive;
4. Accurate and kept up date where necessary;
5. Not kept for longer than is necessary;
6. Kept secure;
7. Necessary to actively demonstrate compliance with all of the above principles

processing in accordance with individuals' rights and not transferring to countries without adequate protection are no long principles but have specific

Article 89 of the GDPR and Schedule 2 Part 6 of the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA) provides exemption to some of the data protection principles and individual rights for processing personal data for 'research purposes' including statistical or historical purposes. These are noted in the checklist below.

For guidance on the Data Protection Act for Social Research please see the MRS Guidelines for Social Research, April 2013 which can be accessed using the following link:

[https://www.mrs.org.uk/standards/legislation/tab/data\\_protection](https://www.mrs.org.uk/standards/legislation/tab/data_protection)

Guidance on large data sets can be found at the Information Commissioner's Office website – BBig data, artificial intelligence, machine learning and data protection September 2017. J <https://ico.org.uk/media/for-organisations/documents/2013559/big-data-ai-ml-and-data-protection.pdf>

You may also find JISC Legal Information on Data Protection and Research Data Questions and Answers, (last updated July 2018) helpful. <http://www.jisclegal.ac.uk/guides/data-protection>

Note: Personal data which is anonymised<sup>1</sup>, permanently, is exempt from compliance with the DPA and registration process. See endnotes for further details.

Conditions which must be met for a research exemption to apply under Schedule 2 Part 6 of the DPA 2018	Please indicate	
1. The information is being used <b>exclusively for research</b> purposes?	Agree	Disagree
2. The information is not being used to <b>support measures or decisions relating to any identifiable living individuals?</b>	Agree	Disagree
3. The data <sup>2</sup> is not being used in a way that will <b>cause or is likely to cause, substantial damage or substantial distress</b> to any individuals or very small groups?	Agree	Disagree

<sup>1</sup> **Anonymous data** is prepared from personal information but from which, an individual cannot be identified by the person holding the data. **Anonymisation** is a **permanent** process. Personal data must be treated so that it cannot be processed in such a way as to link the data to a specific individual (e.g., using an identifier). Coded data is not anonymised and therefore not exempt from compliance or registration.

<sup>2</sup> **Data** covers information that is held on computer, or to be held on computer to be processed. Data is also information recorded on paper if you intend to put it on computer.



<i>If you 'Disagree' please provide details why an adverse effect is justified:</i>		
<p>4. The results of the research, or any resulting statistics, will <b>not be made available in a form that identify individuals?</b></p> <p><i>If you 'Disagree' please provide details why identification is intended:</i></p>	Agree	Disagree
<p>If you 'Agree' to all of the above conditions then the use of personal data is exempt from the Second Principle and the Fifth Principle, but you must comply with First, Third, Fourth, and Principles of the DPA alongside protecting certain individual rights and not transferring to countries without adequate protection. If a research exemption does not apply then you must ALSO comply with the Second and Fifth Principles of the DPA</p>		
First Principle: Fairly and lawfully processed		
<p>5. Will you have appropriate <b>informed consent</b><sup>3</sup> secured from participants for the <b>personal data</b><sup>4</sup> that you will be analysing? i.e., <b>inform participants of</b></p> <p>a) What you will <b>do</b> with the data?</p> <p>b) Who will <b>hold</b> the data? (Usually MU, unless a third party is involved)</p> <p>c) Who will have <b>access</b> to the data or receive copies of it? (e.g., for <b>secondary data sets</b>, are you sure that appropriate consent was secured from participants when the data was collected?) <i>If 'no' please provide details and any further actions to be taken:</i></p>	Yes	No

<sup>3</sup> **Informed consent** means providing participants with a clear explanation of the research project in order for them to give informed consent regarding the use of their data. Individuals should be informed that their involvement is voluntary and that they have the right to refuse or withdraw at any time without any negative consequences.

**Informed** refers to the following information being provided to the data subject/participant:

- i) Who you are, the organisation you work for and who else is involved in the research project or using the data.
- ii) What data will be collected and how.
- iii) Who will hold the data, control access to the data and how it will be stored and kept safe and whether it will be transferred to a third party.
- iv) How the data will be used.
- v) How long it will be kept and what will happen to it at the end of the project.
- vi) Risks related to any aspects of the research project and data, benefits of the research project and any alternatives.

<sup>4</sup> **Personal data** (sometimes referred to as personal information) means data which relate to a living individual who can be identified from those data whether in personal or family life, business or profession, or from those data and other information which is in the possession of, or is likely to come into the possession of, the data controller. The data is of biographical significance to the individual and impacts an individual in a personal, family, business or professional capacity. It includes any expression of opinion about the individual and/or statements of fact.



6. If you plan to analyse <b>sensitive (known as special categories of personal data under the new legislation) personal data</b> <sup>5</sup> , have you obtained <b>data subjects'</b> <sup>6</sup> <b>explicit informed consent</b> <sup>7</sup> (as opposed to <b>implied consent</b> <sup>8</sup> )? <i>If 'no' please provide details:</i>	Yes	No
7. If you do not have the data subjects' explicit consent to process their data, are you <b>satisfied that it is in the best interests of the data subject</b> to collect and retain the sensitive data? <i>Please provide details:</i>	Yes	No
8. If you are processing <sup>9</sup> personal data about <b>younger individuals or those with reduced capacity</b> , have you put a process in place to obtain consent from parents, guardians or legal representatives, if appropriate? <i>Please provide details:</i>  <b>Not applicable. Participants are adults with capacity.</b>	Yes	No
9. Will you have a process for managing <b>withdrawal of consent</b> ? <i>If 'no' please provide details:</i>	Yes	No
10. Will it be necessary or desirable to work with external organisations e.g., charities, research organisations etc. acting as <b>a third party</b> i.e., directly providing a service for us or on our behalf that involves them accessing, collecting or otherwise processing personal data the third party will become a data processor under the DPA?	Yes	No

<sup>5</sup> **Sensitive/special categories of personal data** means personal data consisting of information about the **data subjects'**,

1. Racial or ethnic origin,
2. Political opinions,
3. Religious beliefs or other beliefs of a similar nature,
4. Trade union membership
5. Physical or mental health or condition,
6. Sexual life,
7. Genetic or biometric information

Criminal matters are technically now not part of the list of special categories of data and have their own section in the legislation but for practical purposes it should be treated the same as the above.

Also personal financial details are vulnerable to identity fraud and should be handled confidentially and securely although not defined as sensitive under the Act.

<sup>6</sup> **Data subject** is a living individual to whom the personal data relates. If an individual has died or their details have been anonymised then their data does not fall within the Act. Personal data relating to deceased individuals may still be owed a duty of confidentiality.

<sup>7</sup> **Explicit informed consent** is where an individual actively opts to participate.

<sup>8</sup> **Implied consent** is where an individual must inform the researcher that they wish to opt out.

<sup>9</sup> **Processing** of personal information includes collecting, using, storing, destroying and disclosing information.

<i>If 'yes' then you will be using a third party as a data processor you must take advice from the Middlesex University Data Protection Officer about the planned contractual arrangements and security measures.</i>		
11. Have you written an appropriate privacy notice to provide to individuals at the point you collect their personal data?  (Please see ' <b>Guide to Research Privacy Notices</b> ')  <b>Second Principle: Processed for limited purposes</b>	Yes	No
Will personal data be obtained only for <b>one or more specified and lawful purposes</b> , and not further processed in any manner incompatible with the purpose(s)? (Research data subjects should be informed of any new data processing purposes, the identity of the <b>Data Controller</b> <sup>10</sup> and any disclosures that may be made.)  <b>Research Exemption Note</b> (GDPR Article 89): Personal data can be processed for research purposes other than for which they were originally obtained if that processing does not take measures or decisions with respect to the particular data subjects (unless necessary for approved medical research); and no likelihood of substantial damage or substantial distress to any data subjects That data may also be held indefinitely.  <b>Not applicable</b>	Yes	No
<b>Third Principle: Adequate, relevant and not excessive</b>		
12. Will you only collect data that is <b>necessary</b> for the research? <i>If 'no' please provide details and any further actions to be taken:</i>	Yes	No
<b>Fourth Principle: Accurate and where necessary, kept up to date</b>		
13. Will you take reasonable measures to ensure that the information is <b>accurate, kept up-to-date</b> and <b>corrected</b> if required? <i>If 'no' please provide details:</i>	Yes	No
<b>Fifth Principle: Not kept for longer than is necessary</b>		
14. Will you check <b>how long data legally must be kept</b> and <b>routinely destroy</b> data that is past its retention date and <b>archive data</b> that needs to be kept?  <b>Research Exemption Note</b> (section 33(3)): Personal data processed for research purposes can be kept indefinitely.  <b>Not applicable</b>	Yes	No
<b>Chapter 3 GDPR: Processed in accordance with individuals' rights under the DPA</b> <sup>11</sup>		

<sup>10</sup> **Data controller** is the person who either alone or jointly on in common with other persons determines the purposes for which, and the manner in which, any personal data are or are to be, processed. The fact that an individual or institution holds or processes personal data does not make them a Data Controller if they do not determine the purpose and manner of that holding or processing. (This is probably one of the most widely misunderstood definitions of the Act.) In most cases the Data Controller will be Middlesex University, however further guidance and clarification can be sought from the Middlesex University Data Protection Officer.

<sup>11</sup> **Data subject rights** include:  
The GDPR provides the following rights for individuals:

- The right to be informed
- The right of access
- The right to rectification

15.	If you are intending to publish information, which could <b>identify individuals</b> , have you <b>made them aware</b> of this when gaining their informed consent? <i>If 'no' please provide details:</i>	Yes	No
16.	Will you allow <b>access to all personal data</b> held about a data subject if an individual makes this request?  <b>Research Exemption Note</b> (Schedule 2 Part 6 DPA): Where the results of processing personal data for research purposes do not identify a data subject, that data subject does not have a right of access to that data.	Yes	No
17.	Will you ensure that all researchers who have access to <b>personal data</b> understand that it <b>must not be provided to any unauthorised person or third party</b> (e.g. family members etc.) unless consent has been given?	Yes	No
<b>Sixth Principle: Kept secure</b>			
18.	Will you ensure that personal data will be <b>stored in locked cabinets, cupboards, drawers</b> etc. (regardless of whether data is on paper, audio visual recordings, CDs, USBs, etc.)?	Yes	No
19.	Will you ensure that if personal data is to be <b>stored electronically</b> it will only be kept on <b>encrypted devices</b> ?	Yes	No
20.	Will you ensure that individuals who have access to the personal data are aware that <b>email is not a secure method</b> of communication and should <b>not be used for transferring the data</b> ?	Yes	No
21.	Will you ensure that <b>disposal of personal data</b> will be via <b>confidential waste services</b> or in the case of <b>electronic media and hardware</b> should be <b>destroyed</b> in line with Middlesex University guidelines and procedures?	Yes	No
<b>Chapter 5 GDPR: Not transferred to other countries without adequate protection</b>			
22.	Will you <b>ensure that personal data is not transferred outside the EEA</b> unless one of the following applies? i. The country you are transferring the data to has been approved as providing adequate protection ii. You have obtained explicit informed consent from the individual(s) iii. You have a contract in place with the recipient of the data, which states the appropriate data protection requirements. iv. You have completely anonymised the data.	Yes	No

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The right to erasure  
 The right to restrict processing  
 The right to data portability  
 The right to object  
 Rights in relation to automated decision making and profiling.

. Access means an individual can make a subject access request for all copies of all personal data held about them and ask to whom it has been disclosed. An individual potentially has access to personal comments written about them. It is an offence to deliberately edit or destroy data once a subject access request has been received. Third parties do not generally have access to subject data unless an exemption applies or there is overriding public interest. There may be limited third party access to ordinary personal data relating to a business or professional capacity in the public interest through the Freedom of Information Act.

Any concerns in relation to compliance with the DPA should be discussed with the Middlesex University Data Protection Officer.



## Research Fieldwork Risk Assessment

This form is for students and staff undertaking any type of research fieldwork<sup>12</sup>

The Principal Investigator/Supervisor is responsible for completing a risk assessment of their research activities i.e., identifying any potential hazard which could occur during data collection activities and determining appropriate actions to minimise the risk of harm, accident or illness. The results of risk assessments should be shared with all project staff. All team members should be given a copy of the completed risk assessment(s) to ensure that they have a full understanding of all issues identified and addressed.

PLEASE NOTE: applicants completing data collection in an external institution/organization may need to complete and submit the risk assessment documentation provided by the institution/organisation, as required for insurance purposes.

<b>Project Title/ Reference/ID No.</b>	Project Title: Exploring the sense of connectedness and engagement felt in Awe.	Reference/ID no:
<b>Researcher details:</b>	Name: Tilda Yeow Xin Jie Student no. if applicable: M00710641	Role: Principal Investigator and Data Collector
<b>Researcher details:</b>		
<b>Next-of-kin for Tilda Yeow Xin Jie</b>	Name: Christina Ong Sing King	Contact Details: +65
<b>Next-of-kin for .....</b>	Name:	Contact Details:
<b>Date of risk assessment:</b>	16 Feb 2021	Review Date:

<sup>12</sup> **Fieldwork** is 'any work carried out by staff of students for the purposes of teaching, research or other activities while representing' Middlesex 'University off site'. (*UCEA Guidance on Health and Safety in Fieldwork 2011*).

**DECLARATION:** By submitting this form you are agreeing to allow us to be in contact with your next-of-kin in the case of an emergency.

**Please give details where the research/data collection will be completed:**

Location	Name/position of contact	Place for fieldwork/organisation	Address	Tel:	Email:
1.	Tilda Yeow Xin Jie	Online through a video conferencing platform at personal place of residence.	251 Jarvis St, Unit 1521, Toronto, Ontario M5B 2C2	+1 437 231 5500	tilda.yeow@gmail.com
2.					
3.					

**POTENTIAL HAZARDS: please inform us of any hazards you may face whilst on location**

**Examples of Potential Hazards:**

- Adverse weather: exposure (heat, sunburn, lightening, wind, hypothermia)
- Terrain: rugged, unstable, fall, slip, trip, debris, and remoteness. Traffic: pollution.
- Demolition/building sites, assault, getting lost, animals, disease.
- Working on/near water: drowning, swept away, disease (weils disease, hepatitis, malaria, etc), parasites', flooding, tides and range.
- Lone working: difficult to summon help, alone or in isolation, lone interviews.
- Dealing with the public: personal attack, causing offence/intrusion, misinterpreted, political, ethnic, cultural, socio-economic differences/problems. Known or suspected criminal offenders.
- Safety Standards (other work organisations, transport, hotels, etc), working at night, areas of high crime.
- Ill health: personal considerations or vulnerabilities, pre-determined medical conditions (asthma, allergies, fitting) general fitness, disabilities, persons suited to task.
- Articles and equipment: inappropriate type and/or use, failure of equipment, insufficient training for use and repair, injury.
- Substances (chemicals, plants, bio- hazards, waste): ill health - poisoning, infection, irritation, burns, cuts, eye-damage.
- Manual handling: lifting, carrying, moving large or heavy items, physical unsuitability for task

Location	Potential risk/hazard	Who might be harmed and how?	Precautions to be taken to control this risk	Additional safety measures/equipment that may be needed	Action by who?	Action by when?	Done
Online	Interviewing with an online video teleconference platform	There may be technological interruptions such as poor internet connectivity that may disrupt the interview	Participant and researcher to do a test call a day or two before the actual interview to ensure that the participant's browser supports the video conferencing platform. If the connection is severely disrupted, the interview will be rescheduled for the remaining time available.	The researcher will have two devices, one using Wifi and one using a Data plan. The device using Wifi will be the primary tool, and if there is a connectivity issue with Wifi, the device using Data plan will be used.	Tilda Yeow		
Online		Participant may be interrupted by other people at home or at work	Participants will be advised to join the interview in a space where there are minimal interruptions. This will be explained in an email and during a pre-interview briefing call. The interview will also be scheduled at a time that is most ideal for the participants to ensure that they can be as uninterrupted as possible.		Tilda Yeow		
Online		Participants may not be in a confidential setting and feel uneasy speaking about their personal lives.	Please see above. In addition, participants will be advised that if they feel too uneasy to speak, they may at any time pause the interview or choose not to elaborate on their points.		Tilda Yeow		

<b>Online</b>	<b>Equipment</b>	Faulty equipment may result in lost data for the researcher.	The voice recorder and USB data storage device will be checked before the interviews.	A secondary voice recorder will also be used as a backup in the event that the primary one malfunctions. There will also be 2 USB storage devices used.	Tilda Yeow		
<b>Online</b>	<b>Emotional dysregulation</b>	Participants may feel anxiety or other distressing emotions.	<p>Participants will be briefed before the interview about the potential of feeling emotional or anxious as they recount their stories. They will also be reminded at the start of the interview that they may pause the interview at any time.</p> <p>In cases where the participant becomes angry and/or abusive at anytime during the process, I will employ conflict resolution principles and de-escalate.</p>	Additional emotional support sources will be provided to the participants during the debrief.	Tilda Yeow		
<b>Online</b>	<b>Medical Emergency</b>	Participants may require medical attention during the interview.	An emergency contact as well as address will be obtained in case an ambulance needs to be called.		Tilda Yeow		
<b>Online</b>	<b>Identity fraud</b>	Participants may be assuming a false identity	Verification of each other IDs will be done at the beginning of the call. I will be presenting my Middlesex Student ID badge		Tilda Yeow		

### Examples of precautions:

- Providing adequate training, information & instructions on field/location work tasks and the safe and correct use of any equipment, substances and personal protective equipment. Inspection and safety check of any equipment prior to use.
- Assessing individual's fitness and suitability to environment and tasks involved.
- Appropriate clothing, environmental information consulted and advice followed (weather conditions, tide times etc.).
- Seek advice on harmful plants, animals & substances that may be encountered, including information and instruction on safe procedures for handling hazardous substances.
- First aid provisions, inoculations, individual medical requirements, logging of location, route and expected return times of lone workers. Establish emergency procedures (means of raising an alarm, back up arrangements).
- Working with colleagues (pairs). **Lone working is not permitted where the risk of physical or verbal violence is a realistic possibility.**
- Training in interview techniques and avoiding /defusing conflict, following advice from local organisations, wearing of clothing unlikely to cause offence or unwanted attention. Interviews in neutral locations.
- Checks on Health and Safety standards & welfare facilities of travel, accommodation and outside organisations. Seek information on social/cultural/political status of field/location work area.

### FIELD/LOCATION WORK CHECK LIST

1. Ensure that **all members** of the field party possess the following attributes (where relevant) at a level appropriate to the proposed activity and likely field conditions:

Safety knowledge and training?

Yes

Awareness of cultural, social and political differences?

Yes

Physical and psychological fitness and disease immunity, protection and awareness?

Yes

Personal clothing and safety equipment?

Yes

Suitability of field/location workers to proposed tasks?

Yes

2. Have all the necessary arrangements been made and information/instruction gained, and have the relevant authorities been consulted or informed regarding:

Legal access to sites and/or persons?

Yes



Political or military sensitivity of the proposed topic, its method or location?

Not applicable

Weather conditions, tide times and ranges?

Not applicable

Vaccinations and other health precautions?

Not applicable

Civil unrest and terrorism?

Not applicable

Arrival times after journeys?

Not applicable

Safety equipment and protective clothing?

Not applicable

Financial and insurance implications?

Not applicable

Crime risk?

Not applicable

Health insurance arrangements?

Health insurance is covered by the state.

Emergency procedures?

Yes. An emergency contact will be obtained from the participant.

Transport use?

Not applicable

Travel and accommodation arrangements?

Not applicable

## Application for Ethical Approval

### Section 1 – Applicant Details

#### 1. Details of Applicant

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Given Name Tilda Xin Jie

Family Name Yeow

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#### 1.1 Is this an application for a student research project?

☒ Yes

☐ No

#### Resubmission

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#### 1.2 Please indicate below:

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☒ This is a NEW Application, not submitted before.

☐ This is a RESUBMISSION of the application to address issues raised by the reviewers.

☐ This is a resubmission to address MINOR AMENDMENTS.

#### Co-investigator/collaborator details

1.3 Are you the Principal Investigator? (Supervisors are usually the PI, unless the applicant is a doctoral student)

☒ Yes

☐ No

## Section 2 – Details of proposed study

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2.1 Project Short Study Title (max of 5-6 words)

Connectedness and Engagement in Awe

2.2 Project Full Time (This should be consistent on all documents relating to this research study)

Exploring the sense of connectedness and engagement in experiences of Awe

1 May 2021

2.3 Proposed start date (This must be a minimum of 10 working days after submission of your application to allow for the review process.)

Dec 2022

2.4 Proposed end date

Aim(s)

2..5 Please state the main aim(s) and research question(s) with references and citations (where applicable.)  
(The word limit is 250 words)

### **Research Question:**

Exploring the sense of connectedness and engagement in experiences of Awe.

### **Research Aims**

The research aims to understand the experiences of connectedness and engagement felt in Awe, and how these experiences impact one's way of living. For the interest of this study, the understanding of engagement may also be understood as involvement or participation. Using Emmy Van Deurzen's (Van Deurzen, E.2009) Four Worlds of Existence as a guiding framework, connectedness and engagement in the world includes the physical, personal, social, and spiritual worlds. Specifically, the study aims to understand the following:

- i. The felt experience of connectedness and engagement that is felt in awe, such as the emotions, thoughts, and sensations involved.
- ii. The ways in which individuals feel connectedness and engagement with the world.
- iii. The ways in which individuals make sense of their experience and the possible impact on their ways of being.

### **References**

Van Deurzen, E. (2010). *Everyday mysteries: A handbook of existential psychotherapy* (2nd ed.), New York, NY, US: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group

2..6 Would you like to include a document with further information?

☐ Yes

☒ No

## Section 2 - Summary of research study and rationale

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2..7 Please provide full details of the method(s), study design, data to be collected, how data will be obtained, with rationale and information about participants, hypotheses, data analysis and benefits of the research, with references and citations (where applicable)

### **Research Design**

The research is a small, idiographic qualitative study employing the hermeneutic phenomenological method of IPA to explore the sense of connectedness and engagement in experiences of Awe. A homogenous sample of 8-10 participants will be recruited and semi-structured interviews conducted online.

### **Data Collection**

Data will be collected through semi-structured interviews conducted online. A Canadian PHIPA (Personal Health Information Protection Act) and PIPEDA (Personal Information

Protection and Electronic Documents Act) compliant video conferencing tool such as Doxy.me will be used. Semi-structured interviews allow for key topics to be addressed and provides common reference points for data comparison, while simultaneously allowing for unexpected topics to be brought into awareness as participants speak of their lived experiences. As the aim is to derive rich and thick descriptions, the planned interview duration is 60 minutes, and follow-up interviews may be planned if needed and if participants give their consent.

A pilot interview will be conducted and analysed, before proceeding to further interviews. The learnings from the pilot's end-to-end process, including the suitability of the interview questions, pacing and timing, transcription and interpretation, will enable necessary adjustments to be made before collecting further information.

### **Data Analysis**

With the IPA method, the analysis of the text is similar to free-textual reading with immersion into the data as much as possible (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014) before coding the themes that emerge. However, there is also a possibility of incorporating memo-writing with coding as this will allow me to check in with self-reflexivity, and to bring to awareness the assumptions that I make in my interpretation of the data. Each transcription will be analysed independently, and broader themes may be identified from comparing the various sets of data.

### **Sample**

In considering sampling for the research which uses the IPA method, guidance is taken from Smith, J.A. & Osborn, M. (2015) who suggest a smaller, homogenous sample through purposive sampling, and where participants find significance in the research question. In addition, a topic that is more novel and rare may in itself serve as a boundary in sampling criteria. For this research project, I am interested in adults aged 40-65 who have experienced awe with a felt sense of connection and engagement with the world. The phenomenon itself is specific as I am focusing on particular characteristics (connection and engagement) of a relatively uncommon experience that is awe. In order to obtain rich information, the inclusion criteria is also the ability and willingness of participants to be verbally articulate reflective of their experiences. For the purpose of the study, participants who experienced fear or threat as the main element of their experience of awe will be excluded, as the definition of awe that I refer to sees fear as a possible but non-essential element in awe (Taylor & Uchida, 2019). In addition, participants who feel awe due to the consumption of psychedelic substances will also be excluded. The exclusion and inclusion process will be facilitated through having clear recruitment advertising with the necessary criteria and having an initial screening interview done via e-mail or telephone to gauge if participants are able to reflect upon and articulate their experiences. In addition, the screening interview will clarify if participants have experienced awe, based on how their self-reported descriptions match with the definition of awe set for the study that is described in Section 2.2. With reference to my definition for this research project, I require participants to have felt a sense of connectedness and engagement in their experience of awe, alongside key features such as wonder, respect, and feelings of being part of

something larger than themselves. Participants would also need to report changes or shifts in their perspectives of life and ways of living as a result of their experience.

The demographics that I am interested in are adults of mixed genders and ethnicities in between the ages of 40 and 65, commonly referred to as middle adulthood from the psychosocial point of view (Erikson, 1950). Viewed from the lens of existential life-span development, middle adulthood brings to the foreground the concerns of isolation and death. Becker, D. (2006), in writing about therapy for the middle-aged, highlights one's needs to grapple with isolation on an emotional or ideological identification with the collective, and coming to terms with the limitations of interpersonal intimacy that may have been enjoyed in early adulthood. Jaques, E. (1965) who coined the term 'mid-life crisis', sees middle-age as a time of accepting one's own mortality, but rather than becoming overwhelmed and losing vitality, he suggests that a healthy transition entails the harnessing of creative impulses in a different way, from the more manic bursts of energy associated with early adulthood to a more sculpted and considered way of engaging with life. The psychosocial lens of Erik Erikson (1950) also intersects with existential concerns Erikson proposes that a major conflict in adulthood between the ages of 40 to 65 is that of generativity versus stagnation. In this stage of life, generativity comes from contributing to the lives of others, be it through parenting or by caring for wider society, and there is a need for one to be included and needed in the lives of others (Slater, C., 2003). Stagnation, characterised by lethargy and disconnectedness with life, results from not being able to find ways to contribute. The concern of generativity in this phase of life may also mean potential recalibrations in how one chooses to involve oneself with the physical, social, and



spiritual dimensions of existence. As such, a sample of adults aged 40 to 65 is appropriate since connectedness and engagement with the wider world are themes that are pertinent to middle adulthood.

In order to recruit a sample of people who may be more likely to have experienced the phenomenon, I will be reaching out to people in organizations that serve social, environmental, and spiritual communities. By reaching out to people who are already actively participating in their communities, there may be a higher probability of recruiting people who resonate with the themes of connectedness and engagement in their experiences of awe. Participants need not necessarily have experienced awe before their work in the communities, though they will need to have experienced awe between the ages of 40-65 years old.

The main mode of recruitment will be through advertising with selected community organizations in Canada, with priority given to organizations in the city of Toronto with the hope of conducting in-person interviews though online interviews are also offered taking into account the evolving COVID-19 pandemic. Community organizations may include those that work in the field of environmental conservation, social equality, and community groups of religious and spiritual faiths. The estimated sample size is between 8 to 10, taking into account the possibility of a small number of people who resonate with the topic. The main advantage of recruiting through organizations, such as through their social networks (e.g. Facebook and Instagram accounts) and e-mail mailing lists, is that they have access to a network of members who are already interested and connected to their causes.

A potential limitation is that some organizations may be unwilling or not interested to be involved, in which case the alternative is for me to recruit by joining related interest groups and advertising on social media platforms.

### **Benefits of Research**

For participants:

Taking part in the study might mean that participants' experiences and reflections will go on to contribute to a better understanding of a relatively under-researched phenomenon. There have been very few studies that capture the actual experiences of people who have been impacted by the sense of connectedness felt in states of awe. In addition, participants might also find it meaningful to reflect upon life experiences.

For psychotherapists:

With greater understanding of the influence of awe on connectedness, psychotherapists may be better equipped to work with clients who are challenged with disconnectedness through new angles and discover possibilities of revitalizing a client's participation in the world. As clients may look to Existential psychotherapists on how to live with more depth, breadth, and aliveness, an awareness of awe and its influences may be significant.

Although there is great unknown about what the findings may bring, this research project hopes to shed light on what is otherwise a lesser-known phenomenon in the field of psychotherapy.

For organizations:

Social, spiritual, or environmental organizations that work with disconnectedness and apathy in society might be interested in the studies. The study of awe and its impact on connectedness and engagement with the wider world situates itself in the context of societies which report loneliness, disconnection, and apathy as modern day ailments with potentially great costs to the health and wellbeing of society. In the United Kingdom, loneliness has become a matter of national importance due to its mental and physical health risks, such as depression (Cacioppo, John T. et al, 2006) and the increased risk of heart disease (Valtorta et al, 2016). Research by the Centre for Economics and Business Research (CEBR) in 2017 estimates that disconnected communities cost the UK economy a total of £32 billion every year.

In 'The Spirituality of Awe: Challenges to the Robotic Revolution', Kirk Schneider (2019) advocates for awe-based living as a way to preserve our humanity in the age of the robotic revolution and our increasing reliance on technology and instant-results that diminishes our capacity to engage deeply with life. Since 2020, the COVID-19 global pandemic and the restrictions imposed by most governments on physical socialising has also brought about an acute awareness of the impact of loneliness (Banerjee & Rai, 2020) and the need for social connectedness (Tull et al, 2020). The study hopes to provide greater knowledge and understanding of the sense of connectedness and engagement felt in awe, which may present possibilities for psychotherapists and organizations working in societies challenged by disconnectedness and disengagement.



2..8 Would you like to include a document with further information?

☒ Yes- References

☐ No

## Section 3 – Method(s) and Data Source(s)

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3.1 **Step 1:** Please indicate design/methods included in the study (Please tick all that apply)

- ☐ Simulation, computational, theoretical research, product design/build
  - ☐ Analysis of existing/available data e.g. digital forensic investigation techniques etc.
  - ☐ Case study (in-depth investigates of a single person, group, event or community, may require observations and interviews)
  - ☐ Direct observation(s) and/or taking photographs, video recordings etc. of participants
  - ☐ Action research, insider/participatory research, ethnography
  - ☐ Questionnaire(s)
  - ☒ Interview(s) / Focus group(s)
  - ☐ Field study
  - ☐ Lab-based study (excluding computer lab)
  - ☐ Experiment/quasi-experiment (e.g., with control groups/interventions)
- 

3.2 **Step 2:** Please indicate data source(s) below. (Please tick all that apply)

- ☐ Simulation, computational, theoretical research, product design/build
- ☐ Existing/archived data or documents, e.g., from UK Data, external organization, internet site, social media site, mobile device(s), app(s) etc.
- ☐ Human participant(s) – children (under 18yrs), vulnerable adults or with impaired mental capacity to give consent
- ☒ Human participant(s) – non-vulnerable groups, but may include adults in an unequal power relationship to the researcher e.g., students/employees
- ☐ Human participant – ONLY my own data (e.g., personal data)
- ☐ Archived human tissue samples stored under MU HTA licence
- ☐ Collective or use of human tissue/products (e.g., blood, saliva)

- ☐ Genetically modified/engineered organisms (GMO's)
  - ☐ Primary human cell lines (directly cultured from their source organ tissue or blood cells)
  - ☐ Imported human and or non-human samples
  - ☐ Human or non-human materials requiring transfer between UK Institutions
  - ☐ Materials from UK tissue banks
  - ☐ Animal(s) or animal parts (not included in above categories)
  - ☐ Flora, foliage, minerals or precious artefacts
- 

## Section 3 – Risk Assessment to be completed by ALL Applicants

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Evaluation of risk level - The level of risk will determine the number of reviewers required to consider your research ethics application. (A higher risk application does not mean that the application will not be approved)

3.3 'Higher Risk' research ethics applications include the following activities. Please tick whether your research involves any of the following:

- ☐ Animal or animal parts
- ☐ Genetically modified / engineered organisms
- ☐ Possibility of causing serious harm to others or the environment
- ☐ Primary cultured human cells (not commercially available)
- ☐ Collection/analysis of human tissue/blood
- ☐ Non-compliance with legislation
- ☐ Potential to adversely affect the reputation of the university
- ☐ Concerns security sensitive research e.g., terrorist or extreme groups
- ☐ Radioactive materials
- ☐ Drugs, placebos or other substances (e.g., food, caffeine) given to participants
- ☐ Adults who lack mental capacity to give consent
- ☒ None of the above

## Research Location

3.4 Will the research, or any part of it, require travel to another country?

☐ Yes

☒ No

3.5 Will this research require in-country travel and/or be conducted in a location that may present potential hazards? (e.g., fieldwork)

☐ Yes

☒ No

## Approval from an External Research Ethics Committee

3.6 Do you HAVE evidence of research ethics committee approval from an EXTERNAL UK Research Ethics Committee for this research study? (e.g., another Higher Education Institution etc.)

☐ Yes

☒ No

---

☐ N/A

---

## Section 3 - Supporting Research Conducted by an External Organisation within Middlesex University

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3.7 Is this research being conducted within Middlesex University by an EXTERNAL organization?

Research conducted within Middlesex University by other Higher Education Institution (HEI) or organization which requires access to data for/about Middlesex University staff and/or student's needs to be supported by a Middlesex University Senior Manager or delegate.

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☒ No

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☐ Yes, and I can upload the Middlesex letter of agreement for support and access now

☐ Yes, a letter of agreement is required, but this will be provided after Middlesex ethics approval is obtained. I have a letter confirming this requirement which I can upload.

---

## Compliance with Existing Legislation

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3.8 Will you ensure that the data/outputs from the research (e.g., products, guidelines, publications etc.) will comply with existing legislations, e.g., not breach copyright, privacy, use of computer networks etc.

☒ Yes

☐ No

3.9 Could the data/outputs from the research (e.g., products, guidelines, publications etc.) cause harm to others directly, or through misuse?

☐ Yes

☒ No

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## Security Sensitive Categories

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3.10 Does your research fit into any of the following security-sensitive categories? If so, indicate which:

☐ Commissioned by the military

☐ Commissioned under an EU security call

☐ Involve the acquisition of security clearances

☐ Concerns terrorist or extreme groups

☒ None of the above

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## Section 4 - Materials/Equipment

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4.1 Would you like to upload further information/copies of materials/details of equipment to be used in the research?

☒ Yes

☐ No

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## Possible Issues

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4.2 What possible data collection issues do you anticipate that have not been covered so far and how will these be managed?

Possible data collection issues include:

1. Dropping out of video-conferencing interruption due to speakers/microphones not working, or poor internet connection.

Participant and researcher to do a test call a day or two before the actual interview to ensure that the video and audio functions are working. If the connection is severely disrupted, the interview will be rescheduled for the remaining time available. Also, The researcher will have two devices, one using Wifi and one using a Data plan. The device using Wifi will be the primary tool, and if there is a connectivity issue with Wifi, the device using Data plan will be used.

2. Participant may be interrupted by other people at home or at work, or may not be in a confidential setting and feel uneasy speaking about their personal lives.

Participants will be advised to join the interview in a space where there are minimal interruptions. This will be explained in an email and during a pre-interview briefing call. The interview will also be scheduled at a time that is most ideal for the participants to ensure that they can be as uninterrupted as possible.

3. Voice recorder and USB data storage device malfunctioning.

The voice recorder and USB data storage device will be checked before the interviews. A secondary voice recorder will also be used as a backup in the event that the primary one malfunctions.

4. Participants may feel anxiety or other distressing emotions.

Participants will be briefed before the interview about the potential of feeling emotional or anxious as they recount their stories. They will also be reminded at the start of the interview that they may pause the interview at any time.

5. Not being able to recruit enough participants or participants withdrawing

The participant recruitment strategy will include multiple avenues of outreach, such as through social media pages and contacting relevant organizations.

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## Section 5 - Incentives and Payments to Researchers

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5.1 Are there likely to be any personal payments, benefits or other incentives that the Principal Investigator and/or other research collaborators may receive for conducting this research?

☐ Yes

☒ No

## Section 6 - Safety Issues

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6.1 Are there any adverse risks or safety issues (e.g., from potential hazards) that the research may present to you and/or for your participants or others?

☐ Yes

☒ No

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## Potential Impact of the Research

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6.2 Are you going to be selecting data that may not accurately represent the wider data set and/or participants' views which may cause bias?

☐ Yes

☒ No

6.3 Please state any negative impact(s) that might result from your research, and how this might be managed?

A potential negative impact is that participants may become upset during the process of liaising with me or during the interview. One way to mitigate this is to maintain consistent, clear, and timely communications and to revise conflict resolution principles. The Participant debrief will also include resources to help participants attend to their mental and emotional health needs if the interview brings up distressing emotions and thoughts that they want to further address.

## Section 7 – Research Funding and Resources

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7.1 Is the research part of an application for external funding or already funded e.g., by the ESRC?

☐ Yes

☒ No

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7.2 Provide details of any additional resources required for your research (e.g., equipment, travel costs, devices needed to access data etc.) how these resources will be obtained, estimated costs and who is covering the cost.

The costs of the research are completely covered by myself, the primary investigator. The costs include:

1. Voice recorders- Est CAD 25 each
2. USB data storage encrypted/fingerprint access- Est CAD 20-25 each
3. Lockable cabinet- Existing item, no further costs.
4. Laptop (primary) and mobile phone (secondary)- Existing items, no further costs.

## Section 8 – Other Issues – to be completed by ALL Applicants

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8.1 Does the research involve any ethical and/or legal issues not already covered that should be taken into consideration?

☐ Yes

☒ No

8.2 Are there any other documents you would like to attach?

☐ Yes

☒ No

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Other Ethical and/or Legal Issues

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8.3 Does the research raise any other risks to safety for you or others, that would be greater than you would encounter in everyday life?

☐ Yes

☒ No

### Conflict of Interests

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8.4 Are there any conflicts of interests to be declared in relation to this research?

☐ Yes

☒ No

## Section 8 - Data Management, Ownership and Intellectual Property

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8.5 Who will be the owner of the data from this research?

Usually the owner will be the Principal Investigator and the supervisor for undergraduate and master's level students' projects. Doctoral students are usually considered to be Principal Investigators and the owners of their data. However, such issues are worth clarifying and you may need to check who owns the data if collecting data within an organization.

Principal investigator, myself.

8.6 If there are any intellectual property issues regarding any documents or materials you wish to use, provide

details below:

No
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## Signatures

Researcher	Please ensure you enter an electronic / handwritten signature. <b>(do not just type in name)</b>	Click here to enter a date.
Supervisor	Please ensure you enter an electronic / handwritten signature. <b>(do not just type in name)</b>	Click here to enter a date.
Chair of Ethics	Please ensure you enter an electronic / handwritten signature. <b>(do not just type in name)</b>	Click here to enter a date.

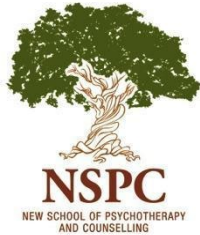
## Ethics Amendment - February 2022

	Current	Proposed Change	Reason for change
1	<b>Sample demographics:</b>  Adults aged 40-65  (page 25-27)	Adults aged 35-65	Extending the lower age limit would allow me to reach a bigger pool of potential participants while still keeping in line with the purpose of interviewing people in their middle adulthood. Jaques, E. (1965) suggests that 'mid-

			life' begins at around age 35.
2	<p><b>Recruitment:</b></p> <p>The main mode of recruitment will be through advertising with selected community organizations in Canada, with priority given to organizations in the city of Toronto with the hope of conducting in-person interviews though online interviews are also offered taking into account the evolving COVID-19 pandemic.</p> <p>Community organizations may include those that work in the field of environmental conservation, social equality, and community groups of religious and spiritual faiths.</p> <p>Page 29</p>	<p>The mode of recruitment will be through advertising on social media platforms and emailing groups that are involved in environmental conservation, social equality, and community groups of religious and spiritual faiths.</p>	<p>As interviews will be conducted online, there is no requirement for participants to be from the same city where I live (Toronto), and participants can reside in any country as long as they fulfill the inclusion and exclusion criteria. The area of interest (ie Awe and connectedness) is not country specific.</p>
3	<p><b>Researcher contact email:</b></p> <p>awereseach2021@gmail.com</p>	beinginawe@gmail.com	

## Appendix E: Sample Participation information sheet and Consent Form

### Participant Information Sheet



*The Department of Health and Social  
Sciences  
Middlesex University  
Hendon  
London NW4 4BT*

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Date:

**Researcher Name and Email : Tilda Yeow Xin Jie**  
beinginawe@gmail.com

**Supervisor Name and Email : Dr Simon Cassar**  
office@nspc.org.uk

### **Research Title: Exploring the sense of connectedness and engagement in experiences of Awe**

Thank you for your interest in participating in this research, which is conducted as part of my doctoral research in the Dprof in Existential Psychotherapy and Counselling program, awarded by Middlesex University, London, UK. This form provides key information about the research and what the process would entail for you should you participate. This includes information about participant rights and confidentiality.

#### What is the purpose of the research?

Awe is a complex emotion and for the purpose of this research, is defined as the sense of respect, wonder, connectedness, and being part of something larger than the self. The research aims to explore and understand how people experience and make sense of the sense of connectedness and engagement as felt in experiences of awe.

#### Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen as you meet the criteria of the research study. Participants selected meet the following criteria:

- Aged 35 to 65 years old



- Have felt a sense of connectedness and/or engagement with the world in their experiences of awe
- Felt that the experience had influenced or shifted their perspectives on life.
- The experience of awe needs to have taken place between the ages of 35 to 65 years of age.

### Do I have to take part?

Participation in this study is voluntary. After you have given consent to take part in the study, you are able to withdraw from the project up to 2 weeks after the date of your interview with no obligation to provide reasons for your withdrawal.

### What will happen to me if I take part?

If you do decide to take part, please contact me via my email address and we will arrange a pre-interview call to clarify any questions you may have regarding the research project and your participation. I will also review the consent form with you, after which you may sign and return it to me via Docusign.

The actual interview will take between 60 to 75 minutes. At any point of time during the interview, you may pause or stop, as well as withdraw from the study. As you're recounting your past and present experiences, a list of community therapy services will be provided to you if you would like to seek further support.

To ensure that the study is rigorous, I offer participants a chance to review my analysis of your data and you will be able to comment and provide any additional inputs that you think will better reflect your experiences. Please check on the option in the consent form should you wish to be contacted for this purpose.

### What are the possible disadvantages to taking part?

A possible disadvantage to taking part is that you might not find the interview experience to be a meaningful investment of your time.

### What are the possible advantages of taking part?

Taking part in the study might mean that your experiences and reflections will go on to contribute to a better understanding of a relatively under-researched phenomenon. There have been very few studies that capture the actual experiences of people who have been impacted by the sense of connectedness that they felt in states of awe.

In addition, you might also find it meaningful to be reflecting upon your experiences.

### Consent

Please review the consent form that accompanies the information sheet. You may withdraw at any point up until 2 weeks after the interview, at which point your data will be destroyed.

### Who is organising and funding the research?

This research is organized and funded by myself, under the guidance of two research supervisors, as part of the Professional Doctorate in Existential Psychotherapy and Counselling program at The New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling and Middlesex University, UK.

#### What will happen to the data?

All data will be password protected and encrypted. Raw data, which refers to audio recordings of our interviews, will be kept locked in a secure physical location and destroyed after it has been processed and analysed. The processed data is anonymised and will not contain any personal identifying features such as your name, organization, and location. The anonymised data will be held in my personal place of residence in a locked cabinet for 10 years, after which it will be confidentially destroyed. The doctoral dissertation is held electronically in the Middlesex and NSPC repository.

The data is to be used as part of my doctoral research thesis. The thesis will be read by my research supervisor, examiner, and also later made available to the public via the Middlesex University library. I may also present my findings through presentations, talks, and seminars. Regardless of the medium or mode of presentation, confidentiality will be upheld and the data presented will be distilled and anonymised.

#### Who has reviewed the study?

All research with human participants has to be reviewed and approved by an Ethics Committee. The New School of Psychotherapy and Research Ethics sub-committee have approved this research study.'

Thank you very much for your interest and participation in this study.

Please contact me at [beinginawe@gmail.com](mailto:beinginawe@gmail.com) should you have any further clarification questions.

Researcher: Tilda Yeow Xin Jie

Supervisor: Dr Simon Cassar



**Middlesex University School of Science and Technology  
Psychology Department**

## **Written Informed Consent**

**Title of study and academic year:** Exploring the sense of connectedness and engagement in experiences of Awe (2022-2023)

**Researcher's name and email:** Tilda Yeow Xin Jie, beinginawe@gmail.com

**Supervisor's name and email:** Dr Simon Cassar, office@nspc.org.uk

- I have understood the details of the research as explained to me by the researcher and I agree to be a participant in the research.
- I confirm that I have been given contact details of the researcher and her supervisor in the Participant Information Sheet.
- I have understood that the research involves a 60-75 minute semi-structured interview that will take place over a secure video conferencing platform and that the interview will be audio-recorded.
- I understand that I can ask for my data to be withdrawn from the project from today and up to 2 weeks after the date of interview, with no obligations to provide any reasons.
- I understand that the data will be coded and anonymised and that all measures will be taken to ensure that there are no identifiable features of myself in the study.
- I have understood that the data will be kept on the researcher's computer and storage devices that are password protected and encrypted. I also understand that hard copies of my data will be kept in a secured cabinet in the researcher's home.
- I understand that my data will be confidentially destroyed after 10 years.

- I understand that the data I provide will be used for analysis and publication as a doctoral dissertation and in peer reviewed journals and I provide my consent that this may occur.
- I understand that the researcher may be presenting her study in other formats, such as presentations and talks in professional conferences and workshops, and non-academic writing in mental health publications. I also understand that in all such circumstances, data will be anonymised.

**Optional:**

☐ I understand that the researcher may contact me after the initial interview to review her analysis, and I am willing to be contacted. I also understand that I am not obliged to provide further information or comments if I am contacted.

Print name \_\_\_\_\_

Sign Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

**To the participant:** Data may be inspected by the Chair of the Psychology Ethics panel and the Chair of the School of Science and Technology Ethics committee of Middlesex University, if required by institutional audits about the correctness of procedures. Although this would happen in strict confidentiality, please tick here if you do not wish your data to be included in audits: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix F: Themes derived from interviews A- G

### Interview A: part of pilot study

#### THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE EXPERIENCE

The following table summarises the qualitative characteristics of the experiences of awe and connectedness that Anna had expressed.

<b>Novel and uncommon</b>	<i>"I haven't had many of those experiences so i was so amazed..." p3 r1-4</i>  <i>"So that was the first time I really had that kind of experience". P6 r-3</i>
<b>State of flow</b>	Anna described her experiences of awe in a large group and in Taichi as moments of being in a state of flow and being immersed.  <i>"...it's like, instead of thinking about the movements or having the movements doing something to yourself, you kind of become the movement." p25 r1</i>  <i>"My whole person...is my whole person involved there, very present, in the moment, in that very moment and very all there." p8 r-1</i>
<b>Embodied</b>	Anna had a physical experience of connectedness in awe, especially with her heart, which she related to positively and described as a feeling of happiness, and being energetic.  <i>"...it's like I felt physically my heart connected with the group or with the person I am with..." p7 r1</i>

	<p><i>"...it's good...it is strong...it is (breathes heavier, pauses for a long time), it is a good feeling. It's..it's..tsk.. You can say it's the feeling of happiness," p7 r5</i></p> <p><i>"I know it affects my heart, but I think it affects in a good way. If it's doing something bad, it's also doing something good because I feel energetic with this kind of experience." P14 r7-2</i></p> <p>Anna also experienced a uniting of feelings and beliefs in an embodied way.</p> <p><i>"What I was feeling what I think what I believe altogether, and (there's) that's physical experience that is singing is that physical is very emotional..." p19 r-1</i></p>
<b>Vitality</b>	<p><i>"Full of life, powerful in terms of being full of life. That's what it is like, is again, energising. It is movement... to turn the movement is feeling alive, feels very alive." p19 r3</i></p>
<b>Amazing and Extraordinary</b>	<p>Awe was experienced as an overwhelmingly good emotion. p5 r-3</p> <p><i>"I felt almost like flooded by this emotion, really good emotion, a good sense of awe [laughter for a while]" p5 r-3</i></p> <p>The experience was so amazing she had to process it.</p> <p><i>"I had to go to my bedroom and write about it, I had to write about it because it was amazing, something extraordinary." p5 r5</i></p> <p>She could not contain the experience to herself and needed to express it.</p> <p><i>"I had to i couldn't keep it just to myself. I had to..." p10 r3</i></p>

<p><b>Beyond cognitive awareness and understanding</b></p>	<p>Anna expressed that the experience of awe and connectedness was beyond her current understanding, as if coming across new knowledge. Referencing her experience in a group setting, she reflected her sense of connectedness as one that transcends her current awareness.</p> <p><i>“We’re connected with that group in a way that it goes beyond just what we can think understand.” [p4 r1]</i></p> <p>There was not only an element of discovering new information, but a sense of coming into awareness of what she already knew.</p> <p><i>“But it’s not just an understanding because... there is this thing of knowing things that i don’t even know i know” [p9 r3-1]</i></p> <p>Anna resonated with the theory of altered states of consciousness and the experience was transcendental for her. There was a sense of mystery as she had responded in a group interaction by saying things that were coming from beyond herself, yet she seemed to know that it was meaningful.</p> <p><i>“And i was hearing him talking about this altered states of mind, of consciousness and he wrote a book about that so i knew that this is what he talks about.. so i thought this is what he is talking about [laughter ]” p6 r1</i></p> <p><i>“When it came out of my mouth, it came with something that was meaningful...not coming from myself.” p4 r3</i></p> <p>During the course of the interview, there were also many moments where Anna appeared to struggle to put into words her experiences, with many long pauses, sighs, and attempts to find the appropriate description. She also articulated the difficulty of reflecting in words.</p>
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	<p><i>“To be connected...it’s....(long pause) (sigh), there is this deeper kind of communication um...connected...(long pause)...the communication flows, it’s easier to communicate it’s uh (long pause) hard to describe eh...” p9r1</i></p>
<p><b>Connectedness to others: being part of a group</b></p>	<p>The context of being part of a group had been a significant feature in Anna’s experiences of connectedness in awe. She felt a very strong connection that she attributed to being in a big group.</p> <p><i>“...so it was a very strong connection... in experiences like that especially in big groups...” p3 r1-3</i></p> <p><i>“I would call it as a group experience.” p5 r5</i></p> <p><b>She experienced ‘oneness’ with the group</b></p> <p>An aspect of group connectedness that she particularly enjoyed was being connected to people in harmony and experiencing acts of service between group members. She felt oneness with the group and togetherness in the group.</p> <p><i>“...it felt like we were one... big thing altogether [laughs]” p3</i>  <i>“We were like one. We were one thing happening we’re one big movement happening.” p25</i></p> <p>Furthermore, it appeared that in addition to oneness, being in the group provided a sense of cohesiveness and harmony through doing things together and performing acts of service for one another. The feelings of group cohesion and unity was very positive for Anna and she felt like immersing herself in the feelings forever and not leave.</p>



“...we're doing everything together looking after everybody together we cook for each other we clean for each other we teach each other ... it's like a ONE BIG wave of people moving doing things being connected to people. I love that! (laughs heartily)” p26 r5

She feels like she wants to be in the feeling of being immersed in the group forever p26-r3

*“You don't want to leave the feeling...I could be there forever (laughs)” p26 r3*

However, in the experience of onenes and immersion, she was simultaneously aware that she was separate and part of a larger whole. While the boundaries between self and others seem to become less defined, there was still autonomy over when she wanted to be alone and separate from the group.

*“I know i am separate from the other person but it's almost like the feeling of being one with the group, being one with the person” p8 r7*

*“You feel like you're not yourself alone...you're not separated from the group you can be if you want but you feel like you were one thing moving together.” p25 r2*

### **Empathy and Intuition**

Anna expressed that she felt deeply connected to another in her group experience, and seemed to have perceived and responded to a group member so intuitively that there was a high level of resonance.

*“I said things that I didn't know that it REALLY DEEPLY (inaudible) another person that lady she came to talk to me*

	<p><i>and she said “Well you know i think you could only have said what you said if you have had this kind of experience that i had too.”” p3 r1-2</i></p> <p>“VERY deep empathy, very. (nodded her head)...able to really REALLY know things about the other person that i know not only in my mind but uh...have an awareness that might not be just cognitive awareness but what you call deep empathy... “ p9 r5</p> <p><i>“ And didn’t seem to me to be something so important but when i said i could feel like the group so QUIET. So i knew it was something that had to do with the group. Had to do with me,and had to do with the group too. “</i>  . P4 r1-1</p>
<b>Spiritual Dimension</b>	<p><b>Awe and connectedness is greater when experienced in a religious/spiritual context.</b></p> <p>Anna has experienced awe in different contexts, and reflected on how experiencing awe in a spiritual context. Recounting on an experience of awe and feelings of connectedness when she was participating in a religious event, she expressed that she felt a greater magnitude of awe and feelings of connectedness. She is a practicing Catholic and was singing as part of a group, and described the experience as more powerful because of the connection to God and also that it spiritually connects her to people.</p> <p><i>“This awe is experienced in connection with God, the Creator of the Universe. This is huge. That kind of connectedness. Powerful. (pause) It’s BIGGER, it’s bigger.” p18 r6</i></p>

*“Because of this... it's this connectedness with the Creator, but also the spiritual connections with people.” p21 r3*

*“It's the most powerful, most powerful...because it's not only myself.” p24 r7*

For Anna, awe can be experienced as an individual, the spiritual dimension allows people to experience awe in a broader way and increases the connection from the individual to the group and the universe and beyond. She also had a sense that without a spiritual dimension, the experience of awe is also limited.

*“I think there are levels of awe, I think there are spiritual levels of (awe)...you can have awe, a state of awe just by being in the moment very present. Having yourself (inaudible) in this wonderful way to have this awe like that, but also can have awe when you feel connected with another person or the universe or beyond the universe, you extend the... I think you amplify the amount of awe or the magnitude of awe.” p23 r1*

*“I have thought about how limited it is, for some people when they don't have this spiritual life, how more limited in this experience than those who have...” p23 r3*

As Anna reflected more on the role of faith in the experience of awe, she expressed that faith indeed was crucial for more intense experiences of awe. It appeared that having access to spirituality opens up a person to greater a awareness and experience of awe.

*“...awe relates to faith, if you don't, you can have awe. But*

	<p><i>you're never going to have the strong experiences I have, as those who have this spiritual thing going on..." p22 r3-1</i></p> <p><i>"...but when there is this spiritual dimension, the person is aware of that and and exercise that. They may have..they have a broader experience. They have more... they can have this awe. P22 r3-2</i></p>
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## STATE OF BEING THAT FACILITATES THE EXPERIENCE

### Being present and intentional

Anna's experiences of awe and connectedness have been very positive, and she expressed a keenness to understand how to access the experience for herself more frequently. Being present in the moment and grounded were significant to her, and she emphasized a 'letting go' of distractions and worries and being intentional about her presence. Being present in the moment could also mean being present to others who were with her.

*"Being present with my client and with the group and just be myself and be there, no distractions nothing, just live in that moment by what the moment is and having that intention to be there with people..." p11 r1*

*"Being present being in the moment and just let any worry, any tension, let it go... is that quietness, internal personal quietness, absence of worries..." p27 r2*

Intentionality, rather than an inbuilt disposition or personality, was deemed important to her in order to experience awe and connectedness.

*“...it's an attitude, this isn't a disposition, it's an intention to be in that that way.”*  
p12 r7-1

## **Openness to the experience**

Anna also reflected a certain sense of openness to the experience and to the unknown, allowing the experience to unfold without too much involvement from herself. This also happens in her interactions with her clients as she tries to facilitate the experience in her role as a psychotherapist.

*“By being there, things will happen. In Taichi the movement happens and in therapy too, movement happens. It is like when you try to do too much, doesn't work.”* p27

*“We cannot think of what we're going to say right with my client...without my own intentions or my own fears about the client or my own worries about the client, it's most likely I will let the client be him or herself...”* p28 r3

## **THE VALUE OF AWE AND CONNECTEDNESS**

### **It is human and relational**

Anna sees awe as an experience that is fundamentally human and as her experience of awe has been very much linked to group contexts, she sees awe as an experience that is relational in nature.

*“I think it's a very human kind of experience...”* p28 r5

*“I'm here thinking like this experience of awe has to do with our human, uh...being human and being in NEED to be with others, being in relationships...”*  
p29 r1

She has an interest in accessing the experience more often. P11 r1-1

*“I experienced it myself and it helped me to cultivate that kind of thing to help myself to get myself to that kind of experience more often.”*

### **It contributes to her spiritual and professional life**

Anna expressed that the experience of and feelings of connectedness have added value to her spiritual and professional life. As someone whose faith is important to her, the experience of religious awe and connectedness to God had increased her understanding of her faith and motivation to practice it.

*“keeps me more motivated to keep growing my faith and to keep practicing my faith... I can feel I can understand things...”* P20 r-3

Interestingly, even though her personal experiences involved feeling connected to other people in a group context, she related awe to being so full of connectedness and life that one can be alone and not lonely. She recounted reading about the life of monks and reflected on how awe could be spiritually nourishing that one could live alone and not be lonely.

*“they can only live their lives of being so alone because they have experiences such ...completely... such awe your lives that they’re so full of life, so full of connectedness that they can be alone for their entire lives, not feel lonely...”* P28

r3

On the professional front, Anna has also experienced the therapeutic effects of awe and connectedness in her practice, and sees a therapeutic shift in client work, as well as a relational depth where both her and the client are moved.

*“That experience is... very therapeutic. It’s the way i see. And when it happens...in therapy for example those are moments that not only myself but the*

*client is also very touched and moving and...something change in the client..."P10 r4-2*

She believes that the experience is helpful in that it facilitates positive and healthy changes and brings about 'happiness'.

*"It's the kind of experience that can help people. So... it is movement, I truly believe that this stage of movement is very positive, is very healthy. So I want that to happen. Right? So I started to cultivate it to happen to hopefully (inaudible) happiness as frequently as possible in therapy." p12 r7-2*

<b>Interview B</b>	<b>PET</b>	<b>Experiential Statement</b>	<b>Page Ref</b>
The Experience of Awe	Getting insights	So it was a lot of like waves of realisation of like WOW this is much bigger than me, my friend and I or this plan that we, this friend and I conspired to surprise our performing friend. It was quite a lot bigger than just that trip.	P3,64
	Overwhelming	I am still left with this like quite overwhelming feeling that I am still kind of processing I guess.	p1,13
		...physically being in an airplane to get there and to come back, uhm like physically not being on the ground, like there's something really meaningful about that. Uhm and how fast the travel was like it all just seemed to happen very fast and so like landing back home it took couple of days doing laundry doing mundane tasks of just like coming back into my life, my bigger life HERE.	p6, 146
	A shared experience	I think in leading up to going to the concert uhm my other friend and I uhm were just talking about all of the other people that will be in the space sharing this experience tsk like this physical space of experiencing the music, like the physical space of having this experience...this shared experience. So LARGE room larger than like my headphones or larger than my living room where i listen to the music before so physically, the space is bigger and sharing the space with other humans felt really significant.	p4, 97
		...just felt like such a big (takes a deeper breath in) collective experience uhm but everyone in the theatre was also remembering (higher pitch) someone uhm and probably FEELING quite a lot tsk um ...so i was quite tearful tsk (Started to tear up) in the concert uhm and very moved to be experiencing the music live, really the first live music I experienced in over 3 years.	p2, 54
	Embodied experience	Yeah for sure I think I feel like a kind of knitting or like a tightening sensation in my chest and throat, uhm, there's something about allowing my tears to fall freely in the dark theatre but not like wailing.	p5, 118
		Hmm (long sigh with an exhale and a pause)...I think uhm reminding myself to let something move like to let my body move a little bit if I noticed I was holding my breath to or holding myself or holding my tears, holding my emotion back, holding myself still, sighing was a reminder to let myself move, to let my feeling move somehow.	p5, 129
	Part of a greater process	We've worked closely together and i was quite aware of her process planning this concert so it was a culmination of something special about knowing her personally	p1,7



		Yeah...I think it began in 2019 when this friend and i began to speak about this person and...uhm how i was present, where we were, we were doing something very particular around that time, uhm like a creative project and just happened to intersect and so allowing her grief to be present through that process as it needed to be uhm i think that's when this began so this concert experience is just another uhm another stop on the way like uhm maybe there will be another yes, so yes, i am saying yes to your question and that i am realizing in this moment that the inception sort was quite a lot earlier	p19,553
What the experience showed her/Impact of experience	It changed her perspectives on grief.	Uhm...and just has changed how I have thought about being open about remembering someone who has died or dealing with death and loss because there was also a lot of joy in the music uhm and hope...	p2,30
		:(inhale) Yeah...i wonder that too. It is still very fresh (clears throat) i think my relationship with this particular piece of music has changed...uhm...tsk..uh...(long pause) and I am just wondering about how to talk about people dying it feels very sudden but I have this experience to close losses and they were very close together in the spring and I think my experience of moving those that happened before the concert but uh even that experience felt different and then there's kind of a closing down like- oh well the required amount of grieving time is over so we have to stop talking about it now...and I think this experience of the concert and witnessing my friend and the other artist putting it together like -no no there's no end...to uhm...tsk.. grieving for someone celebrating them or remembering them uhm and that will the loss will be not as acute like the painfulness each time you come back around.	p18,511
	It evoked existential questions.	Mmm...well i guess the biggest one being like death, and like endings, like we're all gonna die, why aren't we talking about it? Or people don't want to talk about it can be kind of like a taboo subject uhm..tsk..uh...i think so i think that's part of it. What does it all mean like there was such MEANING this project was infused, imbued with so much uhm MEANING like what this person meant to these two people and another person who was involved and that was in the text and this person's words were used as (inaudible) for loved ones.	p24,695
		Something like breaking convention around death or talking about a lost loved one, yeah feel very moved by that. And it's such a universal...we all experience death and grief and loss, like every single person, uhm, so morta- and then big existential i... you know ideas like mortality and... yeah such like fleeting time...	p3,82
What helps her to feel awe and connectedness	Personal developement	I think the the program that i just graduated from and training to be a therapist, beginning to work with clients, working in supervision. I think all of that helps create like a framework for like... for	p21,614

		experience to trickle through...	
		... it's a very different context and I think what's a big difference is that i've carved out and sought out and co-created environments and relationships where it's okay to be weirdly feeling it's okay to be weepy or i dont know honest or not have the right words and i think when i was younger i was just on a track i was in academia i was in a faculty that was all about excellence not about feeling, so yeah I think I have changed and my environment has changed and yeah what you said about allowing myself to be affected or impacted uhm... that is a big... that's important to me and i have created a life where that's possible, more possible.	p17, 493
	Being present to her feelings.	Yeah (nods and says firmly)...Yeah not like...as a support and also uhm...sharing the impact like uh from like crying together right and that initial when the person had just died and it was still very fresh to hearing about like the irritating uhm parts of like planning a concert and planning a project and planning an album. Just being witness, bearing witness to the process uhm...yeah...	p22, 641
		I just was overwhelmed with this feeling of you know I want to be there. It's really important. This is an important time uhm I can..I can make it work, I want to make this work,	p2,41
	Being open	I was young and not... sort of like only aware of this much of my experience and now i'm just completed a very intensive training and as a therapist, i am beginning work as a therapist I've explored a lot more psycho-physical connective movement work so i'm more informed and my body is more informed, i am more integrated with myself now so i guess one of the images I or like metaphors i used earlier was the channel being open and i feel the openness in myself more now...	p13, 352
	A desire for connection	Uhm and weddings and when a baby is born like these big life moments seem to be places where people's guards are lifted, and i think i have always had a yearning uhm it's probably why i pursued the job of a therapist	p7, 189
		I know i can feel your interest or your curiosity which allows me to feel comfortable to share uhm or attuned to how you are receiving me then i am able to know how to share or what to share next like that relational feedback it impact sharing uhm it's more and more what i crave in my interpersonal life and in the very boundari-ed role as a therapist where we co-create a container like that safe container allows...	p10,279

	Personal development and relationships	(Deep Inhale)...i think there's so many layers uhm with like interior and exterior uhm...and just like all my experience up until this moment had contributed so i think the the program that i just graduated from and training to be a therapist, beginning to work with clients, working in supervision. I think all of that helps...	p21,611
	People around her being more authentic.	I would feel like RELIEVED during times of intense grief like when someone in my family has died and we are all together it's like we can FINALLY let our guards down and be real like even if it's just for the wake or during the funeral where people are really open with each other, like the artifice or the sort of like masks of like daily life are...are lifted for just a temporary time in grief.	p7,178
	Having a purpose and context to the experience	i think that has an important part of it is an important ingredient our purpose of our gathering is very clear right now the people who we are celebrating, whether it is like a new life or someone has died like our purpose of coming together is very clear even if we are all having our own...uhm...relationship to the event.  Uhm...versus like for me it's.. I don't love social gatherings like the party afterwards was like awkward, like I felt more awkward...	p14,408
		Like there is a kind of holding back and letting go at the same time and I remember sighing a lot and wearing a mask like there is something kind of hol-I like uhm like a holding back and containing inside a mask.	p5,122
	Having boundaries help to give her a sense of safety and freedom to feel	Yeah I think that's actually related to the containment paradox as well because what I'm learning in my experience and training about developmental somatic psychology it's like how we come to know ourselves is through touch..as a therapist where we co-create a container like that safe container allows...like there's 50 minutes in a session we have this very boundari-ed relationship where that can allow feeling to be present or to experience to be present that in a way that in our friendships or family relationships it may not have been or isn't.	p10,267
		Yeah I guess, yeah I think that's what allows the flow like it's what allows feeling to be present safely or uhm something about the containment allows uhm movement, allows feeling to be present. I think without the containment I don't know what the bounds are of this experience- what if it never ends?	p9,240
Impact of age/maturity on how she experienced awe.	She gives more time to let the experience unravel and	And I think in my 20s i would have just been like oh let's' go to the next thing and sort of like shut it down and now i have more of a desire to continue to let it ferment and percolate and integrate...	p16,471

	integrate.		
	Maturity affects how she makes sense of her experiences.	Yea I think if I was 72 I'd be like God I didn't know anything when i was 41 I was just a little mouse then now i'm like this giant hog... but i think I was really I was young and not... sort of like only aware of this much of my experience...	p12, 349
	Maturity means she can express herself authentically and mindfully.	Yeah i think mm... i think when i was sharing about that before I said something about like allowing tears to flow and not wailing, like what could be construed as losing control like tsk...which i have had that experience in grief and I probably could have had in that theatre had that have been the environment like i would have needed more support to allow that to happen. Like to let go at another level, for even like weeping quietly with like shoulders shaking like i think the tightening is a..it's just a holding,holding, holding (emphasis) like uh... this is an appropriate situational holding back ...just a sensing this is not the time or place to let go to that extent and that's okay.	p23, 672
	Maturity in age enabled her to engage with more empathy and depth	I feel the openness in myself more now... like the ability to be more connected to myself allows me to experience higher highs and lower lows and depth of emotion. I'm imagining going to this concert at 22 and like maybe crying quite theatrically but they would be different tears. This is like...yeah just like tears of empathy (tears up) like I'm able to feel for my friend and her family and their loss as well as my own depth of feeling and my own life experience. If that makes sense they're just different tears now.	p13, 361
	Earlier experiences of awe opened up awakened possibilities	I have had really moving impactful lasting memories experiences singing in community uhm tsk on different topics and like maybe not quite so personally like i am personally connected to this friend who i went to see and i was close with my singing friends differently i think and there's a different time of my life where i was less, i was just not as far along in my journey i was mid 20s doing all the things that 20 year olds do but uhm that was really the start of an awakening oh this type of other- than verbal communication- like non- talking communication, this like bigger type of connecting and communicating and expressing is possible.	p11,304
		...so these earlier experiences that you were asking about those were like my first moments of like drinking the kool-aid or sipping on these tendrils of like something bigger, something shared something more existential and bigger...	p11,333

		...it is this cycle or spiral uh that this experience will keep unfolding and uh i think when i was younger, i'm sort of now juxtaposing those... those singing community experiences which were like in an academic institution where feeling really had no place and we were being invited to feel and that was revolutionary... uhm whereas here it's like well of course we're going to feel uh yeah so it's a very different context...	p17, 486
	With maturity, she is more able to engage with her feelings.	we were very much engaged in the material and not pushing aside her grief like it was just very present. So even something about that that's very radical like taboo in a way like oh we should be studying so let's put that sad stuff away ...that would have been my 20 something year old self's response i think.	p20, 577
Relational/ Sharing of the experience was significant.	She experienced grief through a friend.	so it's been a LONG process of my friend putting together this project and uhm in being with her through her grieving process and uhm we're both musicians so being able to... kind of vicariously experience a grieving process through my friend was really radical.	p1.25
	Her relationship with her friend gave the experience meaning.	...with this friend like we there's not a day where we don't speak about something professionally or otherwise. We co-work together in a particular way and have a lot shared beliefs and values around creativity and artistry and expression and supporting artists and uhm... I think that allowed me to be really present just knowing some of the back like a lot of the backstory of this concert.	p21, 619
		I looped in a mutual friend and we conspired to make this surprise for our friend who was performing and sitting... so i, so I think like the impact of the friendship and our connection as well as this huge subject of connection and loss and grief... it just felt like there's something MUCH bigger than..	p2, 44
	The experience was felt collectively and individually	It's very personal to my friend and their family, uhm.. and I'm... I'm thinking of my own family and my own losses...	p3, 78
		...what does it all mean like there was such MEANING this project was infused, imbued with so much uhm MEANING like what this person meant to these two people and another person who was involved and that was in the text and this person's words were used as (inaudible) for loved ones. That felt very human, they weren't just talking about loss, it was VERY like uhm focused, uhm very clear...	p24, 700
Creativity and engagement with the process	Music provided a different pathway to connect with the experience.	...and yeah it wasn't a conversational experience either. It was a musical experience and i think music for me and for perhaps for other people in different ways allows feeling to emerge and memories to emerge images to emerge in a different way	p25, 721

	Creative engagement with the process enhanced the experience	I think that allowed me to be really present just knowing some of the back like a lot of the backstory of this concert. It wasn't just like a person off the street walking in and oh there's this pretty music like..allowing myself to be quite close to the creative process uhm with my friend like allowed me to receive the experience differently	p21, 624
		I've just watched, I've watched that and I think i knew it and read it and i would say it to clients there's no prescription for grief blah blah blah, but i am watching it and through artistry and music uhm that feels like an important part as well.	p19, 539
The experience of talking about awe.	Talking about awe impacts how she makes sense of the experience.	... talking through it and sort of stumbling through trying to answer your questions has helped me as i said to organize and contextualize and connect to different memories which i enjoy and may have found my way there over a long period of time like it just talking about it with you and trying to find words I think probably have accelerated that integration process.	p25, 727
		...it's taken this amount of time i think it's still settling, and speaking about it with you again i'm sure there will be more settling and shifting.	p6, 142
	Talking about the experience reconnects her to the feelings that it evoked.	I think well many layers of things..uhmm...like i do feel i have tears when i talk about and when i think about the music and the text of the music. It's very personal to my friend and their family...	p3, 74
	Talking about the experience is helpful in processing it.	I think well many layers of things..uhmm...like i do feel i have tears when i talk about and when i think about the music and the text of the music. It's very personal to my friend and their family,	p23, 658
		I don't quite know what meaning to make of it yet but it was very POWERFUL uhm...so starting to put into words i guess and journaling about it, starting to find the words it's helping me to yeah just mmm let that experience move through me.	p6, 162
		I think it is... how I do make it not sound like scholarly...like a project. It's helpful, it is useful to put words to the experience uhm...and yeah it wasn't a conversational experience either.	p25, 719
	Talking about an experience that is fresh is unusual for her.	I don't know how was i present to that differently this time...(inhale) I think even in three months i will have a more fleshed out answer uhm...I guess I could have just focused on the choir experience from my 20's cos that was the second thing that came to my mind but even just choosing this moment to share with you and look at more fully feels different.	p20, 591
What awe is to her	Awe is a big and difficult to define.	Yeah (sighs) I mean i can see why you're immersed in this project because it's such a huge word, indefinable almost.	p8,216

Awe relates to being fully awake and present to emotions.	I don't know the words that are coming up for me are to be fully awake, just fully present, able to just show up fully in your full emotional experience uhm like yeah just a fullness somehow and that is in community.	p8, 219
Awe is a very human experience that is intense and unsustainable.	I think that's what i...what i yearn for in connection and that's...those are spaces that I...I wouldn't want to be in that experience all the time i don't think it's sustainable, and at the same time i was very aware like this is a very human ... uhm experience that we are sharing.	p7,199
Awe relates to having spaciousness for fullness.	I have this sense of like if i were to draw it, draw the scene it's like there's a darkened theatre and all the like you know.. back of people's heads in the dark and the lit stage had all the beautiful lightning and the beautiful projections on the screen and then above it or like surrounding the whole theatre is like this bubble or like a bubble or a drop of water containing like i think that's how i would visually represent awe. It makes no sense Tilda but that's... I don't quite have the words but it's this container that's very spacious and uhm yeah there's just a lot of space for fullness in there.	p8, 224
Awe is experienced in community.	I don't know the words that are coming up for me are to be fully awake, just fully present, able to just show up fully in your full emotional experience uhm like yeah just a fullness somehow and that is in community.	p8, 219
Awe relates to being inspired.	Elizabeth Gilbert ! She has this book about (inaudible) magical thinking or big magic thinking something about artists uhm finding their way. She talks about inspiration being this thing that you know when inspiration strikes it's like if you don't take that thread someone else will take it s	p11, 322
Awe is accessible by everyone.	Yea I think I would expand or maybe animate the image that i suggested before like the theatre and the stage and the sort of cloudy bubble over top of everything and I would like open the doors and see that cloudy bubble is actually just over every one, all of us, like that awe is present ALWAYS in some way. I don't know that it exists outside of us, maybe equally there is sort of that cloudiness bumping up against our insides all the time, I don't know but those are the two things that kind of those images are what come to mind. And i am sort of i am drawing on elizabeth gilbert's inspiration from her...how she talks about inspiration being in sort of the ether and we can draw on it or be open to it at certain times.	p25, 747

<b>Interview C</b>	<b>PET</b>	<b>Verbatim</b>	<b>Page Ref</b>
<b>Experience of Awe</b>	Overwhelming intensity	I think of for awe for me- it's usually either having an experience of something or something happened with a person in my life and I'm just so overwhelmed with the intensity of it.	P1,21
		that experience that I recently had that is still sitting with me quite deeply	p3, 67
		I felt like it was a gift given to me like in that moment that was a gift I felt overwhelmed with uhm happy I don't know if happy...joy...	p6, 165
	Assured	I felt like the guardians of the lake are telling me "everything is going to be okay".	p5, 115
		...you're protected you know this is- the world is falling apart in many ways like you know just all the craziness of the world today and you're okay and we are going to be okay.I really feel like they were telling me the planet was going to be okay.	p5, 118
		I feel like that was a sign from God was telling us we're okay, we're all going to be okay so that was beautiful.	p5, 134
	Excitement	When I was there at the lake, the first thing was excitement... like Oh my god! Look at what I just saw! Of course... I took the photos because I didn't believe I was seeing what I was seeing...	p12, 304
	Felt like a gift meant for her	I was just overwhelmed that that was gifted to me in that moment.	p6, 166
		...sometimes I believe like the event was meant to happen just for me	p1,23
		...that's a moment of awe like my daughter put out her arms to me after four days I KNEW okay, she was meant to be ours.	p19, 536
		...that was an awe moment for me because I was like okay God I get it, I get it Universe, I was meant to be her mom.	p18, 492
		I just felt that it was a moment meant for me.	p6, 147
		I bet you nobody at that lake has seen those guardians (chuckles) so feels like a real gift to me that they wanted me to see them at that moment, right?	p8, 193
	Right place, right time	I was lined up to the moment when I was not able to give birth to a child.	p22, 618



		There's another thing,see? That was a small window in the history of the country where they were doing in like right at the time where I was looking...anyway, see it's overwhelming to me!	p22, 613
		And when we adopted her when I sat down one day and I thought of all the pieces that had to go in order. All the things that had to line up for us to have her as our daughter.	p17, 455
		I think there's a real synchronicity here in the fact that... I recently had that experience which I will talk about, but then two days later my sister sends me the e-mail with the poster. Do you know what I mean ?	p3, 54
		I feel a lot about everything a lot of things have to line up sometimes for the perfect moment...	p7,176
	Novelty in familiarity	felt awe because I felt like "Oh my God you are so stunningly beautiful how did i not see you before?"	p6, 159
		I went "Oh my God I've been looking at this lake for 15 years, I've never seen this. "	p4, 96
	Bigger than self	That's the sense that it's bigger than myself.	p13, 335
		'I'll often say "How can you not believe in something bigger than you when__" and then I'll give an example..."	p31, 881
		like "how can someone not believe in something greater than us when this is in front of us?"	p1, 15
		...it was just a moment of "okay I get it" (says definitively) I hear...I get that there's something bigger than me in this world...	p5, 142
		...when I think of awe it's usually...the sense that I have to believe there is something greater than myself...	p1, 5
		I can't believe somebody created this, like something bigger than me had to create this	p19,523
	Beyond her understanding	I could not...seriously I could not take it in. It was so...like I could not believe that it existed for real, like I'd seen so many photos of it by the time I got there I see it...it took me days before I could really truly understand that it was real...	p48, 1403
		...did the Universe not allow me to give birth to a child because this child was going to need a home? Because this country was telling this woman that she couldn't have two children at this moment? See (emotional) what I mean?...that's why I have to believe in something bigger than myself because it... it's unfathomable	p23, 626

		I was in awe because it hit me that these are the-I felt like these were the guardians of the lake.	p4, 108
		I can't believe I heard a voice, I can't believe I saw those images...	p6, 148
		I feel like the ocean is so huge right...you look out and you cannot see land or you know... I'm overwhelmed all the time when I see that it's just like I can't believe that we're living on this planet that has this thing that just keeps...it can't be...	p13, 336
		Oh my God I cannot believe"...I cannot believe that nature could, you know they're some plants that flower they're so stunningly beautiful, I cannot believe that was created by the seed. Like the whole idea of how that plant had to grow and into that beautiful thing (sounds bemused and amazed), so i'll just look and stare at it and go how did that happen? (disbelief) you know?	p44,12 86
		...when she saw me coming out of the elevator she put her arms out to me (inhale) like I was (flustered as if in disbelief and amazement)...Oh My God how can that little girl who's only known me for four days, she's only 11 and half months old, she put her arms out and she wanted me over that caregiver who she knows, you know what I mean? And I was in, that was an awe moment for me.	p18,48 1
	Awareness of paradox	ironically when i'm aware of the ocean it can be des..it can be as destructive as it can be beautiful. I'm aware of both kind of those....but I think that's life, I think life can be so beautiful and life can also be so hard so I kind of can carry both those things.	p13, 343
		...that was an awe moment for me because I was like okay God I get it... I was meant to be her mom. And again, but it also was a sadness because this little girl- someone else gave birth to her. That woman...she must be heartbroken.	p18,49 2
		...well I think there's a piece of me, I always say to people I tend to be an optimistic uhm realist.	p14, 372
		...it's like it was meant to be. But how can it be meant to be if someone else had to suffer for me to get that? Like that's...so it was..it..it's just in awe...	p19. 516
	Feeling Connected	I felt connected. I felt not alone.	p6, 158

		But when I'm in these moments when I'm in these places where I see the uhm the bigger picture of things it makes me realize yeahm I'm not alone.	p16, 429
		I've overwhelmed with...I'm connected you know to the Universe	p21, 579
		I'm so thankful that there's bees in my garden, whereas you know 10 years ago I wouldn't have even, I would have probably run. But now I just go oh thank you bees I'm so glad you're here like understanding how it's all connected, the tiny bee is connected to that flower and the flower is in my garden that I planted and how that flower grow from that seed so I can have spiritual moment just in my garden.	p44, 1296
		I'm just like Oh my God I wanna say to the tree "you're amazing that you did that!" so I feel a part of it, so there i don't feel lonely i feel like okay I'm on this planet...	p51, 1514
	Being One With/ part of	...it's almost like I want to be the ocean like I want to be one with the ocean it's kind of like that with the guardians	p12, 328
		I'm not alone, I'm on this planet and I'm part of that ocean or I'm part of that tree...the ocean has been here for eternity.	p51, 1493
		...in a moment of awe it can remind me of just one tiny grain of sand in this HUGE you know big sandbox kind of thing but at the same time it reminds me that I'm a part of it all...I'm a really small piece of it but I'm a part of it all.	p16, 436
		I could be feeling lonely but when I'm watching the polar bear I'm looking at the amazement of how it moves in the water...so what it does is it reminds me, when I have a moment of awe when I'm standing by the ocean or looking at the polar bear or looking at the amazing tree, I feel it at a cellular level that I'm part of that.	p50, 1483
<b>What she did while in awe</b>	Taking time	I think I just love the feeling so much, that I that's why I probably give it the time, because i know for that moment...I'm gonna have true one hundred percent peace...	p49, 1435
		I have more time now to sort of be more...aware...see I don't know if I would notice the guardian when I was so busy.	p11, 274
		I believe there's a care to that I do believe it is part of my appreciating it all uhm and the part that I've been able to slow down...	p11, 278
		I really give it time now. Even just like a walk through my neighbourhood, I seriously am way more observant than I probably was even 10 years ago.	p50, 1462

Explore different perspectives	I looked over and I looked at the rock formations and I realized that if I turned this way... I took a photo and I realized when I looked at the photo and instead of looking at it horizontally but I looked at it vertically I could see what ok I could see a figure of a man.	p4,85
Physically taking in the moment	I'm part of all of this and particularly in nature I try to to feel I feel it at my cellular level, that's what I'm trying to do, right down to my toes, I'm trying to take it in.	p52, 1528
	It's about taking this really deep breath. It's almost like I'm, I wanna take this deep breath and I wanna take that into myself.	p12, 318
	...it feels like taking a really deep breath like REALLY deep and going to a really peaceful place like going into REALLY...	p11, 299
	it feels like taking a HUGE deep breath like REALLY REALLY a good deep breath and it goes right in and taking it in. I'm trying to almost get it to a cellular level, which is kind of...you know... interesting	p13, 351
	Sometimes when I am standing there I try to physically take it into my body (inhales) 'cos I want to later when I am not there, so when I am sitting on my couch in my living room one day and I am kind of feeling not good or something I want to sort of be able to close my eyes...	p9,214
	I took the photos and then I told myself put your phone down because your phone is only going to be the picture uhm but you want to take it in. I try to go to a really place of peace.	p12, 312
Paying Attention/ Appreciating	Absolutetly I was (actively appreciating), I was you know I was also coming to the realization that our trip was ending.	p8.203
	I wasn't just sort of by passing the beauty I was looking I was going like God the trees, the colour, the trees are so beautiful oh my God the rocks are so ...I was even looking at small things like my feet in the lake. I was LOOKING, right? And in the LOOKING i was given the gift of SEEING this particular beautiful thing...	p7, 183
	I was standing there just looking at it...and just thinking Oh my God this is so beautiful and I heard a voice say "look here"	p3,81
	It's more brilliant today.	p35, 998
	I've been going to that lake for 15 years and this last visit I was standing. I often go down this little point and I often go stand by the point and I just look at the water and it was one of those days where the water was like crystal like still...so the rock formations that were on the land and the trees were reflected into the water like perfect symmetry.	p3,71

		If you're walking at the lake looking at your phone you don't see the swan over there, and the swans and the two swans over there and you think oh those two swans mate for life...you don't see if you're not looking...	p45, 1332
	Being open	How did I get to be in that exact moment standing at that edge of the lake with the weather just perfect and like...and like AND my body at that moment was open to receive that.	p7, 171
<b>Where she finds awe</b>		...even walking in my neighborhood...and you know of course it's fall, how can you not have, listen, if you live in Canada, in the fall, I don't know how you can't have awe.	p34, 986
		...this happens to me a lot when I am in beautiful places like the Grand Canyon or on top of a mountain or particularly by the ocean.	p9,209
		The truth is I do have awe in winter because sometimes when the snow falls it's so beautiful that you just can't help to love it as long as you don't have to drive anyway.	p35, 1010
		I'm very drawn to oceans and I've very drawn to trees. So both oceans and trees really uh I have moments of great awe just standing by either of those things	p11, 287
		When I'm out in the world, honestly, all of it, when I look at it even my garden...	P44, 1281
<b>What she in awe of</b>	Resilience	the reseilience of human beings to keep going even in the midst amongst the war, you know? That's awe, that's amazing to me.	P26, 723
		The other part of awe for me is also resilience when I look at nature particularly because I'm always amazed at how resilient nature is even with all the destruction that humans are doing to it.	p51, 1056
		I'm in awe of my daughter she's such an amazing human being,	P18, 512
	Magnificence of nature	I think it's hard for me to believe that especially during fall...you wouldn't feel awe at some point just looking at the colours. They're so magnificent that they just are breathtaking, you know?	p35, 1014
	Opportunity to expeirience	I'm always in awe that I got to live and experience those things and some of things are now gone, right?	P20, 562
	Helpfullness of people	But I'm sure that there's even moments of awe that they are experiencing even amongst how they're helping each other, even, EVEN in the moment of chaos where something's happening...	P25, 716

<b>What awe leaves her with/impact</b>	Desire to share	.some days I just feel like I just want to breath in that, all that feeling because I just want to breathe it out to the world and say “here”...I'm breathing it out and hopefully this will give someone else a moment of (pause), you know?	P49, 1452
		I told everybody, even people who don't believe in these stuff I've been telling them	p5,123
	Feeling protective/gratitude	I became even more, that made me even more fierce about it because I did not want anyone to treat my kid in any way differently than she deserves to be treated	P28, 782
		I have just grown in my gratitude (immensel)- have grown in my gratitude and I've also grown in my fierceness in protecting the underdog or protecting those who cannot protect themselves that kind of thing- so that's what that's the change it did for me.	p29, 824
		I want this world to become a good place for her. I want women you know I want women to be safe in the world I want her as an Asian woman to be safe in the world I want, I want the planet to be protected because it needs to be protected and there's only so much of it and I want her if she decides to have children to be able to have a place for her kids to be ...safe... that kind of things so it all became this big thing for me.	p30, 859
	Increased her self-awareness	...what shifted that day to me was like, I've always known that in my heart of hearts I just believe people are people...what adopting B did for me was it really just reminded me to not... I mean listen, we all have prejudice, like we all have our things, but it really reminds me of my judgements, how quickly I can judge people.	
	Empathy	but that experience of becoming a mom in that way was a moment of awe because I, I'm always trying to balance, like every year on my daughter's birthday, I send I say a prayer for her birth mom right? I...I wish I could someone could just let her birth mom know that although she couldn't raise her for whatever reason that well she's amazing...	P19 ,527
		I understand why he's like he is, but I don't have to let him be, I don't have to accept it, I don't have to sit there, I can just maybe give him another way to look at it	p33, 957
		so it made me way more empathetic and it made me fierce (chuckles) in TRYING	P29, 821

	Awareness of own privilege	I do feel this sense of the world is uhm a freakin' amazing beautiful place but I also am very aware that I'm my where I'm standing allows me to see the beauty and privilege,	P25, 708
		...have to remember number one, I am so privileged. I am so privileged but my privilege is on the back of some other person's not -privilege.	p22, 602
		I have a practice a gratitude practice and I'm aware every day that I have a privileged life and like VERY privileged.	p15, 391
	Motivation to act	I just work really hard...to take myself and step back...remind myself no they're human, they're human...so it made me way more empathetic and it made me fierce (chuckles) in TRYING	p28, 813
		I have some ideas that I'm going to create something from those guardians. I feel like I want to do something with them.	p6, 152
		it energizes me and it makes me feel more alive, it makes me feel more like you know stand tall or be proud or be connected, do as much as you can you know kinda thing	p52, 1543
	Sense of responsibility	I need to be responsible with it, not taking it for granted.	p15, 414
		somehow there must be a responsibility of mine to somehow share this or at least in my every day life remember it so that I live with gratitude.	p21, 581
		so yes, I feel the responsibility to take care of the planet because it's so beautiful	p24, 659
		I feel responsible for other things around uhm you know around the birth, the adoption of my daughter and stuff like that too...so yeah, just letting people know it's not all black and white, you have to be more aware of the grey.	p24, 662
		I always feel it's my responsibility to remind them that no, I am forever grateful that this little girl that I got to raise her	p22, 595
		I always try to remember that I'm very privileged and that's why I think I see the other side, I would never want to forget that, others...there's a lot hardship in the world	p26, 727

		I really try to make people understand like yes we are fortunate but...there's a mom out there on the other side of this world to this day that I've never met who's heartbroken...I want people to remember that adoption is not just this fairy tale story.	p23, 636
		I know that ignoring that there's hardships would be, it feels irresponsible to me in a way,	p14, 386
	Concern for future generations	I do think it's important and I try to get my daughter to see that... you have to be present and you have to be outside and you have to be in nature and you just have to look...	p46, 1349
		I'm curious about what will happen say for the next generation who spend a lot of time on their phone	p45, 1320
		Hmm, I wonder if people who are posting a lot of beautiful photos on their social media sites, are they doing it just for the posts or are they seeing it?	p47, 1386
	Gratitude	Yes, HUGE gratitude, huge gratitude yeah, yeah.	p16, 419
		I'm sad that someone else couldn't raise her but I thank God again that he meant for me to raise her..	p19, 539
		ENTIRE time i was there feeling so much gratitude and love and I can't believe that I was going to be mother to this beautiful child.	p18, 502
	Yearning	I think that's why I give it time now because I'm almost aching for that feeling again.	p49, 1441
<b>Age and Maturity</b>	Less focus on material acquisitions	because I've aged and you know I own a house and I'm secure... you just really start to realize what matters in life and it isn't the thing, it's the experience.	P38, 1091
		I'm at a point in my life where I want less, less, less...because it's less about things and it's more about being kind and taking care and helping your neighbour and uhm oh...there's enough for everybody if we just share it	p43, 1261
		...as an older teacher I was more aware of-it has to be less about the constant uh what's that word, searching and I guess searching is the wrong word because I think sometimes I think I'm still searching, but a-acquiring maybe...	p40, 1155
		But anyway, when you're young, you're always going after then going after...but when you get to a certain age and you got all that. And then you realize oh, it isn't about these stuff, it isn't...you start to realize when you got it all at some point it has to be about appreciating, it has to be about being aware of how fortunate you are...]	p39, 1134



	Less preoccupation with others and less angst.	...as a young person... I spent a lot of time worrying about what other people thought of me and I...was always worried about other kids... I was so unsure of myself...	p36, 1043
		...that hasn't always been that way. I think when I was younger I had more angst just part of growing up but as I grow and had more experiences	P17, 448
		So young age no, but probably in my 20's it started because that's when I started to travel and that's when I started to have bigger experiences...	p37, 1074
	More time	I think I give it time now probably more than when i was younger...	P48, 1420
		I am retired particularly I get to spend more time being quiet and going like you know going for the walk...when you're retired those things are happening all the time and so yeah it's just grown I think.	p38, 1103
	Being more discerning	...plan trips and I go and I wanna see less of the things that are famous for and I wanna see more of the community and the people and the nature. But you know that's again just because after you've done the other you get to learn what you like and don't like.	p48, 1427
<b>What facilitates awe</b>	Caring for next generation	you also start to understand the responsibility you have to leave things for the next generation	p39, 1099
	Novel experiences	I think it was when I started traveling the world that I really started to come out and really get a sense of the wonder, you know like the first time I ever stood on a mountain, you know even in Western Canada right or in Cape Breton in Canada like the first time I ever did the Cabot trail.	P37, 1062
		...then also started to meet people of different cultures and see...wow we're way more alike than we are different.	p37, 1068
	Being connected to the planet/nature	I think you would have a hard time with awe or being spiritual or even caring about the planet when you're disconnected from it.	P45, 1308
		...when I go out into nature particularly or I sit back and even just write my gratitude out like I'm thankful for my cup of tea this morning as small as that might be, it's just a reminder to me that uhm I'm part of all of this and particularly in nature...	p52, 1525
		I can just step out to my yard for a minute, and just see the grass and just see the tree and just yes, so that's what it does, it makes me feel conn (pause) it makes me, it's a reminder to me that I am, the fact that i was born, the fact that I was born is a miracle unto itself...	p53, 1558

<b>What she thinks of awe</b>	Easily accessible	When I'm out in the world, honestly, all of it... understanding how it's all connected, the tiny bee is connected to that flower and the flower is in my garden that I planted and how that flower grow from that seed so I can have spiritual moment just in my garden.	p44, 1281
		I think it's available to anyone. I...I think you would have a hard time with awe or being spiritual or even caring about the planet when you're disconnected from it.	p45, 1307
		it's hard for me to believe that not everybody feels awe at some point	P34, 982
	Complex difficult to understand	...awe is to me it's that it's that ...it's beyond it's sort of beyond my ability to understand it it's so it's so big.	p9,230
		I feel the word awe you know it's something, it's such a little word (upward tilt) but such a big feeling (laughs)	p2,32
		...it's just in awe I don't have the (trying to find words)	P19, 520
	Good to think about it	And they either have experienced it but not thought of it or they never thought of it but they are now going to think about it, that's going to be a good thing, that too.	P54, 1595
	Infectious	That's what it does! If people are open to other people's experiences and you sit and you hear it and you listen I think that's exactly what it does.	p53, 1577
	Promotes personal growth	I think that's what awe and having those experiences and seeing the world as a bigger thing and (inaudible) at the connectedness of everything, I think that's what it does and I think that allowed him to grow.	p33, 947

<b>Interview D</b>	<b>PET</b>	<b>Verbatim</b>	<b>Page Ref</b>
Experience of awe	Unique	...what a like incredible experience that probably the other people that were standing around this may not have had.	p26, 868
	Uncommon	the experiences are spread out and we're not like all the time it makes it like really magical and I do see it because then it's like oh this is special, because it's once in a while.	p33, 1059
	Surprising/unexpected	that feeling of awe oh this is like a rare thing so this is really amazing to be able to see it in a place that you wouldn't be expecting to see it.	p33, 1068
		surprising and took us off guard a little bit but it was also very amazing	p26,

			864
		I wasn't afraid of it and I don't know why I wasn't, but there was just something about the site itself that felt very peaceful and very... nurturing and soft and a lot of qualities like grace come to mind like and just so having this experience even though it felt very like tingly and kind of electrifying in that way it wasn't scary...	p26, 838
Being open to unexpected		always turns out like something happens that we weren't planning to happen but it turned out to be like really cool and fun	p31, 1000
Being rewarded		I don't know how to describe it other than that for whatever reason I'm meant to go a certain way and then I get rewarded with something typically.	P29, 949
Gratitude		I get to do these things and like be in a place that even has the kind of nature to go and do it. And just felt very grateful and appreciative to do that.	p5, 161
		..really appreciating like what I was surrounded by that the campsite was so beautiful...	p5, 152
		this little moment of feeling grateful to see this tiny butterfly that flies thousands of miles and does all kinds of amazing things and it just looks so flimsy really (chuckles) like how does this tiny thing survive but it's so beautiful to see them in the intricate patterns on their wings and you know i just had this experience of like the magnitude of what it takes for that little butterfly to survive and feeling so grateful to be able to see that little moment of it.	p11, 360
Powerful		what a powerful thing to just see these big like incredible animals in like the middle of an otherwise suburban like walking trail like that was a pretty cool experience.	p31, 1013
Amazing/Incredible		...how do they even make it you know like so it's just incredible to me that there are so many things in nature that are like that or... things like that are just amazing to me that seeing it exists in the first place.	p12, 383
		...standing there thinking like how incredible it is standing on this piece of the planet and your own little world kind of thing and yet there's so much going around us, and like feeling like it's kind of crazy sometimes to be on a basically a giant rock hurtling through space (chuckles) like that whole concept is kind of mind-blowing.	p2,50
Magical/uplifting		...don't know how to describe it (laughs) it's just very magical and uplifting and incredible to be there at the right time to do that.	P27, 893
		awe for me was both uplifting and inspiring	p1, 6

	Complex	awe can also be kind of like when you're surprised by something and also a little bit of fear almost can come into it like you can be kind of in awe cos you're like so taken aback by something...	p1, 7
		oh my gosh you don't know what's out there and it could be so many possibilities right like just standing and looking at the stars really does that for me because there's some complexity to it.	p3,70
	Reassurance/ meant to be	a little poke from the universe to just be like "hey you're on the right path like I like that you're enjoying this trip" or whatever it was trying to impart to me is like you're in the right place at the right time that kind of thing it just had that sense of being where I was supposed to be at the moment in time...	p26, 854
		that's like a special thing in that moment that was what i was meant to be doing and just sitting there and just appreciating the moment for what it is	P14, 444
	Connectedness in the moment- shared experience	touched it and it almost felt like electricity like come into my body I wasn't really obviously expecting that to happen and I was like immediately oh maybe like 'A' who's my husband can feel this too so I just grabbed his hand	P24, 798
		I feel like that's kind of the connection between awe and connectedness and being like with other people. You have that possibility of really just sharing something between the two of you rather than each individual trying to figure out for themselves.	p8,263
	Connectedness to something larger than self	It's just something larger than myself-the essence of the butterfly, like you feel like the essence of your own soul and like this little butterfly must also has a soul	P12, 399
		it's almost like if you can imagine like the universe poking you and saying like "hey i'm here and we're connected to each other" kind of thing	p26, 849
		I keep using the word expanded but it feels like you know you can be a part of something bigger than yourself if you are open to experiencing things like awe,	p8,251
		there's some greater creator figure that made all this possible that like you just feel like connected to that source or connected to that original energy that everybody and every living thing has.	p13, 404
	Connectendes s and support	maybe you can ask for help and get support and that enhances that feeling of connectedness and that feeling of like awe and love and kind of flips you to the other side of not being afraid of it.	p8,257

		sometimes awe is a little bit scary so if you ask for help and you could switch over to the positive side of it when you're experiencing more of the connectedness and love and like happiness and peace and whatever it is that you want to feel in that experience rather than being stuck	p9,275
	Love	I guess it's a lot of love maybe? I know a lot of love for the people that I was with, I was with my husband and some friends and then uhm a lot of love for myself and kind of my place in the universe	p5,146
		everything else is very quiet around you but inside you just like I felt very happy in that moment and a lot of love and joy	p5,158
		...have those connections in place is like so important for every one and myself to just feel like that love and community and kind of a sense of coming together...	p8,241
	Difficult to describe	a very visceral sort of reaction that happened that I don't even fully know how to describe that	p23,767
		I don't know how to describe it (laughs) it's just very magical...	p27,893
	Peace/calm	I think for me it's very peaceful and calm like there isn't actually a lot in the moment that's happening it's more just like this very present calm feeling like I don't feel like I have to be somewhere else...	p4,124
		not a lot of feelings coming up necessarily it's more of just like this tranquil kind of state.	p4,137
What helps/hinders		that really connects that feeling of awe of being, like you have to kind of have enough space in your life I guess to even know to appreciate something	p36,1148
	Making space and time	I feel like just within yourself you have to have enough wherewithal to kind of appreciate those experiences or be able to distinguish them from what is otherwise like a pretty regular day...	P36,1171
		so to have to slow down and have like an appreciation for something	P36,1158
	Being present and noticing	I really do try and make an effort, especially for my own mental health it really seems to make such a huge difference for me to stop and be present and appreciate what's going on around me instead of just like going through the motions and being like "everything's fine" if it isn't	P16,518
		just really trying to really appreciate those things rather than just rush by and not notice that the experience is even happening.	p14,455

		they could be so easily overlooked so that's just a nice feeling to know like that uplifting sense of connection can happen the more that we're kind of aware of ourselves and like the surroundings.	P38, 1213
	Tiredness and stress	I feel like kind of congested in my body like i feel like you know drained or tired just like uhhgg I don't really have enough energy to even just stop for like a few minutes and so when i feel like that it's a lot harder to feel those experiences of awe	P167, 505
		there's been times in my life where I've been going through a lot of stress and that experience has shifted a little bit into like maybe that gets a little bit closed off or shut down in certain ways	P19, 613
		a few years ago when i was doing school and i was doing full time i didn't really have time to appreciate that I really felt I had to just kind of go through the motions	P15, 486
	Trusting her intuition	I'll just follow that and if it says right then I'll go right and maybe that takes a different way than where I'll normally go...	P29, 929
		I don't know why I just trust to go left instead of right that day but like I did and it took us into this you know different area that we got to see these deer crossing the path.	p30, 966
		it really is like so that same thing of being at that stone circle at that time of going to this other like stone instead of the big monument one that is at the head of the circle like the same thing that I was at the right place at the right time to experience that	p30, 981
		I don't know (laughs) a sense that like I'm being nudged towards certain things and again I attribute this to like a higher power type of connection to universe	p28, 898
		I was thinking like what a beautiful little moment that I wouldn't have had had I not just followed that instinct to like go outside	p11, 352
		I have senses like that all the time that feel like being in a certain place at a certain time and I find there at that place at that time then something like that happens	p28, 911
		different little things get put in my way like that that are uplifting and fun and then that kind of like is a nudge to me that I'm on the right track... I'm on the right guidance.	P29 .936
		I like to follow those nudges of like "oh I should think about going on a trip to a certain place	p28, 922

	Being open to unknown	I was like I don't really know but it was for me incredible and so I don't know what energy was imparted into us that day or just like that these experiences are possible- I guess was kind of the message that I feel like I took away from it...	p25, 810
	Being attuned to self and others	you're compatible with people or things that's awesome and you can feel that energy within you it feels like positive and uplifting and good and then if you're just not in that resonance with certain things then it kind of I guess feels draining or tiring in some way and then it's like oh that's just information like that's not either a person I wanna hang out with or maybe that place has some energy that it... just doesn't feel right to me there like I wouldn't frequent that place...	P13 ,420
		the more that we're able to be like connected to ourselves the more that we're able to have these experiences of being connected to both the universe and each other...the more you experience the gratitude and appreciation for the things that are really amazing and magical.	P34, 1131
		...just that the special nature of that relationship really does lend itself to these experiences of awe and feeling that expansiveness between that energetic connection again between every living thing I	P22, 725
		there's kind of like a symbiotic relationship which is why I talk about that often, this connection to awe because it (inaudible) how much of an impact that we do have like on other people as well	p18,585
		...the more that they are able to listen to themselves, or do self-care especially, then the more connected they feel both to themselves and to their communities...	P17, 541
	Knowledge/ Awareness	have like enough education to know what the transformational process is for a butterfly that makes it so incredible to see one that like that contributes to those kinds of feelings of expandedness and connection.	P36, 1160
	Worldview	think I like to believe that the world is a magical place (chuckles) so it's just this connection to things that are magical and to me it's those everyday things of like butterflies flying by...	P14, 466
		it's just that kind of philosophy of like that if everything is magical and incredible then I really take the time to stop and appreciate it	P15, 481
Impact of awe experiences	Desire to share in hopes of helping	all these experiences that I find really expansive or kind of you know happy and uplifting and positive I try and also just bring that into my work...with my clients and even with my friends and family that like I help uplift them as much as I can and share these experiences with them so that they can think of something differently or have a different perspective.	p4,100

	Increased empathy and compassion	a lot of on a spectrum of compassion and empathy this really feeling like compassion and empathy for people that have gone through really challenging situations	P20, 666
	Place and purpose in the universe-to help and engage with the wider world	I think that was one of the more recent experiences of awe that I've had that really kind of stands out as like you have a very specific place in the universe I guess and that's like I always look at that like how can I help make my corner just a little better...	p2,59
		so it's just how can I help people connect with the things within themselves that are really beautiful and awe-inspiring and also just like everyday regular mundane things that people write off as like not important that actually really are...	p3,85
		I just feel like if we all have like a purpose somehow and so like I really am called to help people in different ways	p6, 174
		just feels like such powerful work to me, it gives me this sense of like real purpose it's a very like purposeful passionate job for me so I just really love like helping people come to those realizations within themselves and gives me a deep sense of meaning to do that work and a deep sense of gratitude and appreciation...	P21, 697
		...contributing something to a cause that's greater than myself so I like to be involved like that, that you need this research goes on and does something incredible for the world that people wouldn't have had access to before...being part of something like that I think is really cool and just like contributes to the overall good to society.	P34, 1091
		...if I didn't engage and connect in that way I feel like I wouldn't be myself, so if I do engage and connect in this way then it's like me allows me to be authentic and being authentic brings those experiences closer	p35, 1119
	Perspective that the world is magical and can shock and amaze.	I guess was kind of the message that I feel like I took away from it like when i thought about it after it was just like wow the world is really magical and it is it has the potential to shock and amaze us basically	P25, 815
Where she finds awe	Nature	I think most of my things are nature related now that we're talking about this they seem to be all connected that way but I feel like we're also as humans very connected to the earth	P30, 927
	Therapeutic relationship	I would say that happens quite frequently...just that the special nature of that relationship really does lend itself to these experiences of awe	P22, 718



How she sees awe	Being attuned to the smaller moments	it's always the smaller moments to me at this point it doesn't need to be this mind blowing thing for me to feel that, that same like connection point of awe within myself I think going like this because I feel like it's a very heartfelt connection and so I like feel that like love and expansion and that heart-centered connection	P22, 736
		I think coming down to the smaller moments of like gratitude and honour for the things that are available in the world like just getting the time to recognize that they're special and different.	P38, 1204
		the connection itself is like so important and I feel like every one experiences it in some way or another and I'm sure you're gonna hear so many different experiences	P38, 1198
		feeling of like common peacefulness rather than that more like more surprise, awe, kind of experience it's that more like comfortable feeling of awe...so it's just different kinds of feelings of awe depending on the situation too.	p32, 1026
Impact of maturity and personal growth		happy like flow-state like I'm doing what i really want to do and I'm connected to the earth... so I kind of see awe the same way now and still connected to nature in the same way so it really, like particular situation have changed in terms of awe but that kind of underlying thread I feel like hasn't. From childhood I find that it kind of continued into my adult life in a similar way.	p20, 643
		The base of it hasn't changed like I've always kind of had this idea that the world is a magical place...	p19, 610
		I guess a lot of the time growing up like I didn't really feel connected to my family...so it was like oh how do I find this community and this sense of support when I've kind of felt like my life didn't really have that so it's nice to like find those different ways of connecting with family now and friends and like creating those little communities in different activities that I do.	p7,215

<b>Interview E</b>	<b>PET</b>	<b>Verbatim</b>	<b>PageRef</b>
Experience of Awe	Connectedness	I feel more connected to other people because i have a better understanding from my practice of uh you know there's a, everyone's sort of suffering, everyone wants to be happy, uhm and so feel like 'cos I understand myself better, I understand others better, and the moments of awe and wonder is definitely a connectedness.	p26, 818
		I think it will continue to grow uhm i suppose it's less connectedness and more love, but maybe that's what connectedness is (laughs)	P27 ,840

Created from within oneself	...feeling is an internal, it's not being created although you are looking at something from the outside,	p1,12
Unique/one-of-a-kind	my experience is that it is something that creates a feeling inside of you uhm that you wouldn't get from anything else.	p1,7
Seeing for the first time-new perspectives	there's just amazement really of how it looks so different to how i normally see for example a tree trunk. And you know I never really saw them before because I was so caught up in my own stuff	p3,72
	I just saw them it was like uhm...something I had never seen in my whole life before the way they looked and the way they moved	p21, 660
	it's just like I dont know if you go see a...a film where there're 3D glasses and they're all sort of coming at you it's a bit like that I suppose like just to see it sort of differently to how you normally see it, like when you watch a 2d film and a 3d film...	p4,109
Amazed	yeah its just I have never seen them like that before and how amazing they are but that sort of doesn't really describe the feeling just to say "oh so amazing" (laugh) it doesn't really capture actually how it feels...	p4,102
	I remember that feeling of like oh my goodness everything is just so amazing, it's a little bit like that and like I just couldn't stop looking at it and just (exhales) yeah, I don't know what it is it's just it's so hard to describe...	p10,308
	...knowing it's just a crack in the paving slab but it's just because your self isn't there, that's what it is. It's..that's gone...what you're left with just leaves you I don't know tsk how to describe this (laughs) but it's all gone anyway and that just, it was amazing.	p10, 314
Less self-centred	those moments kind of reinforce that or you get the feeling yes, we're not the centre of the universe uhm yes just that feeling that something's so much bigger than just us	p12, 377
	it feels really freeing, and uh you know less sort of like the feeling of it being less me me me and uh, just more kind of spaciousness and openness, uhm and less fearful as well...	p13, 391
Bigger than self	...the moments of awe and wonder, uhm (pause), yeah I suppose it's just that feeling of...there's something much more and bigger and our sort of very small problems...	p12,371
Profound gratitude/privilege	...probably just how precious it is and just a deeper sense of how lucky we are to have it uhm and again it's a feeling it's not "oh we're so lucky to have this amazing planet", it's, it's a REAL, and it's not all the time it's only when I have these moments...how awestruck I am by the preciousness of it...	p5,153

	...so much more appreciative of the planet because I think you know we're trying, I've been trying for a long time to sort of you know play a part in recycling and being more careful with resources and things like that but this is a much deeper feeling of gosh how lucky we are to have uhm tsk this world and a deeper feeling and knowing uhm and of appreciation and sort of wonder of yeah how amazing it is, yeah it's a much deeper level...	p3,87
	i feel quite uhm..uh...hmm...(wistful) this great, grateful that i've experienced it a	p11, 336
Powerful	they're more powerful on retreat so for example and also really odd as well.	p9,280
	it is a powerful experience mmm but it doesn't last very long because normally it's normally i'm just caught by my eyes are caught by something and then I'm carrying on with the rest of my day	p6,169
	...if I've been on a meditation retreat it's really powerful and there, or it can last a very long time,	p2,60
Peace/ Stillness	also the peace that you feel uhm during these moments as well so you're not so sort of caught up in all these anxiety and so on.	p14,413
	...it's more peaceful uhm and uh still- the feeling inside, it's a feeling of peace and still, but also there's still a, and a feeling of amazement and wonder	p3,49
	the lack you know not control actually there's a peak lack of wanting to control things during those moments and that's what brings the peace you're just sort of letting go	p14,418
	that feeling where everything sort of just dies away all the worries and the stress or the just kind of planning and things	p2,30
	the feeling is just that I kind of I suppose a kind of peacefulness because you haven't got all of that going on in your mind which creates a feeling of peace and amazement uhm and stillness. Yeah, stillness.	p21, 668
	...running commentary about oh that's nice or I wouldn't have done that blah blah blah blah blah...and oh God and you realize how exhausting that is you know, just going on all the time and then yeah you just i just didn't have that. I don't have it when I have those moments of kind of awe and wonder. It's just not there at all,	p22,687

	Awareness of paradox	when I have these moments when I see these things more clearly and uhm just kind of how awestruck I am by the preciousness of it and the fragility of it but also the strength of it, uhm how much how it's much bigger than us and more powerful than us	p6,158
	Pleasant	t's a really nice uhm feeling...	p1,25
	Agency	here is just clearer now and there's control as well before when you were smoking cannabis from what I remember you feel in control of your body or your mind you're sort of the experience is happening to you it's got nothing to do with you it's just i suppose chemically induced sort of state something else has created that state in your mind which is then having those effects whereas with this erm I'm, in I have, i'm not controlling anything but I know that I am in control...it's just completely CLEAR. Like clear mind that... in control that sort of thing...	p23,720
	No desire to possess	it's not a desirous thing, it's a yeah...it's not like that. It's not like I see a lamp and like oh that's a really wonderful lamp i really want it, it's like (laughs) it's just there's no desire I suppose it's what it is, it's just that, all it is.	p22,698
	Absorbed	...the way they looked and the way they moved and that's all I saw it didn't have any thoughts about I don't know, making comparisons oh they move like this or "I like this about it", or uhm there's no kind of 'I' involved in how I saw it.	p21,662
	Reassured	I think and also knowing oh i think everything is going to be okay...not in relation to me or anything just in relation to uh i think this planet is going to be okay whether that includes our species continuing or not or continuing on a smaller scale...	p13,396
Impact of Awe	Broader perspectives/ understanding	I think those moments of awe and wonder all contribute to that 'cos it of that kind of realization that things are much bigger than just you so that enables you to see everything like that or try and see everything like that from a bigger and wider picture from all different angles	p28,861
		Yeah love for it, I mean and a not a love for people as in but more of like a in Buddhism it's called Metta more of a sense of kind of uhm tsk again it's just an understanding of where people are better at viewing things differently like I always think about what the Dalai Lama says about viewing it from 14 different angles	p27,850
		the clarity comes in other things as well...yesterday for the first time ever uhm cos I've never really been able to do this before...	p19,590
	Increased empathy and perceptiveness	Even reading a book, I was reading a children's book the other day because I tutor children, and there was a bit in there about these two cats who beat up this other cat and this is like oh that's so awful! (exclaims and laughs) It's just made me a lot more sensitive....yeah...	p17,540

		I mean and I may have got it wrong, but I sort of saw a sadness in him and in her uhm pause an unhappiness i suppose... I've never looked at photos like that before so I thought that's interesting that normally I'd just think oh I've been quite judgemental in the past about what they're wearing for example...whereas it was more kind of seeing them maybe, seeing them...	p29, 609
	Reaffirming spiritual practice/purpose	you realize this is why i'm doing it. I'm doing all of this because it leads to something so much better uhm... Yeah, like a sense of freedom (deep breath and exhale)	p11, 342
		i do feel proud of myself because it's, it was, it's been and it's really hard and you know to sit with all your stuff and it's not an easy thing to do so uhm those moments make it worth, make it all worth i	p11, 337
	Trust	the actual planet seems I don't know just clever, just it's got an intelligence and a beauty that you know we don't see an uhm it will save itself no matter you know whether we help or don't it just feels like there's a trust maybe or something or just again like an appreciation for (exhale) how amazing it is (sigh).	p13, 401
	Loneliness and Connectedness	I do feel more connected even though I've also said I feel more isolated lonely it's a bit of a paradox i think,	p27,836
		I don't wanna be around all of that but also having yeah (exhale) getting better at understanding people better, yeah and having more compassion yeah. It's unusual i suppose or interesting	p28,880
		...not that the experience is a lonely experience at all but just feeling a little bit different to others and different to what others are doing...it's very different now from what i would choose. I'm just going down a very different path...	p16,479
	Needing validation	I think it's important because it means that you do keep up with the practice and the consistency so yeah and it stops kind of me feeling a bit lonely about it as well	p16,475
		it's confirming you know what you've read and then you experience it and then like "oh okay" and it's nice to read uhm tsk other people have experienced it too because then you think oh it is a thing it's not just something that isn't real...	p15,462
	Isolation	...if they still haven't experienced it they still don't have any kind of uhm frame of reference to engage in the conversation	p16,504
		I don't really talk about it to anybody else apart from one or two friends I either talk about it a little bit or change the subject uhm tsk or just don't really understand it...	p14,426

What helps/facilitates		bit lonely because like I said you can't really talk about it because people don't really understand it	p16,496
		I mean it's unique in my circle but I know it's not unique amongst other kind of uhm practitioners with a consistent practice...	p15,455
	Cultivating positivity	I do a lot of work just when I'm not meditating just noticing my thoughts as well so watching my thoughts and uhm exchanging them for positive thoughts if I have any negative thoughts and so the other ingredient for me personally I think is just cultivating more kindness and lightness and joy inside of me uhm because i can't you know w... have these moments of awe if i'm full of raging anger and uhm judgemental thoughts you know im just never going to be able to see anything clearly or have any feelings of joy if i'm filled with that...	p8,226
		... my practice has given me a much better understanding of how sort of human behaviour and how people or why people behave the way they do, why you know we're destroying the planet, uhm, so actually it's made me more compassionate and less angry because it's just given me a better understanding...	p12,358
	Consistency in mindfulness/awareness	I've noticed that I have these more frequently so it's like a consistency really i suppose is the ingredient with my meditation practice in order for me to kind of...like picking up the garbage so that time is often just used to kind of uhm take out all of those kind of thoughts whatever they might be about to kind of clearing and then I think what happens is I'm just able to be more present uhm during moments in the day...	p7,203
		I meditate, for example on retreat i'm just seeing things clearly all the time because I've taken out all the garbage and then I'm doing these deep meditations but I think the daily meditations is just like keeping it up just keeping up uhm clearing and then it allows you to have those moments of clarity...	p7,217
		I meditate everyday so that's kind of one core thing...	p7,194
	Being mindful of stimulants and toxins	...they talk about in Buddhism about sort of purification of mind and body and heart it's like that I suppose just trying to kind of like I say clear out the garbage and limit any kind of over stimulus or toxins and all that so uhm I think that's the difference so just maybe a more pure experience.	p24,751
		...everything so stimulating on the senses and that wouldn't have, probably would have affected me in the past but wouldn't have realized what it was whereas now i just know like it's because of all of that and just trying to guard it...choosing to just to be a bit more careful and to guard those kind of senses...	p17,528

		YEAH exactly so I don't drink anymore because I KNOW how now I realize how it makes me feel, it alters how i feel and it alters my state of mind where i feel numb and i feel less in control and it affects my emotions I can feel the effect it has and I don't like that. And i think it also means that i won't have those moments of awe and wonder if I've had a drink...	p24,74 2
	Being more present and clear minded	i was just like this spoon (giggles) is just so amazing i was like i just can't believe how amazing this spoon is (infectious laughter) but also knowing like it's just a spoon but then i thought about it since i thought it wasn't really the spoon it's because I have done so much deep meditation it was...it was just sort of that you know it was kind of purifying my mind I suppose and I kind of that's what it was I don't know why the spoon was kind of the stimulus for it, the catalyst uhm...	p10,28 6
		I just get it so much more frequently now I could you know it's not unusual for me to have that feeling once a day just by uhm seeing for example a tree trunk and feeling that sense of wonder because i can just see it more clearly now because I'm not caught up in all my thoughts...	p3,64
		I can just see things more for what they really are and uhm that creates a feeling a really joyful feeling and uhm a feeling of awe as well about how,you know, how wonderful and amazing and beautiful the planet is, yeah.	p3,80
		for the first time uhm just seeing someone with...more clearly but also because I don't really know them very well so maybe that sort of helps I didn't have any kind of erm preconceived ideas or anything about them...	p20,63 7
Impact of maturity/age		20 years ago it would have been the same I imagine, (trails off)...I do think though you do have to kind of uhm well for me anyway, you have to have some sort of suffering and kind to have to get to a point where you're like "this is just, just not good!" (exclaims) and uhm like again a stimulus that makes you do something to change	p25,78 5
What she thinks of awe	Easily accessible	just not have that feeling and I know it's because I was just too unhappy inside or yeah just too caught up with all my own stuff you never gonna see it uhm and it doesn't have to be these big things, it's the smallest everything around us uhm	p30,91 9
		...it's the beauty of this world it's all here for us and uhm yeah and that feels really wonderful to know that.	p30,93 6
	Requires awareness of own preconceived ideas and	everything we need is already here everything we need to make us happy is here already, we just we can't see through the filters	p30,92 8

	lenses		
		...well i think i know that's how in ways it is it's just we don't see it as it really is because uhm we're just too caught up in our own proliferations	p5,128
		everything must be like this it just must be like this all the time but we just don't see it so...yeah..	p4,118
		...we've always got to clear all that stuff and work toward seeing it like tha	p5,140
What it is like to talk about awe	Pleasant	...because I can sort of feel it a little bit i mean nothing like I did when it was happening, the memory of it and it's really nice, it's a really nice memory and i feel quite uhm...uh...hmm...(wistful) grateful that i've experienced it...	p11,331
		It feels really nice! Uhm yeah it's nice to talk about it because actually I don't really talk about it to anybody else	p14,425
	Difficult to describe	it doesn't really capture actually how it feels which I know we talked about but I just didnt know how else to describe it i	p4,106
		...that's probably what it feels like yeah it's difficult to describe.	p2,53
		...I don't know i find it really difficult to sort of understand connectedness really or define it	p26,830



Interview F	PET	Verbatim	Page Ref
Experience of awe	Connectedness through shared purpose	...connectedness... yes...it's that everybody was there really wanting to support her in their with their own worlds, with their own suchness of what makes them and that everybody was there wanting to have a lovely time and to be part of something...though their own reasons for you know very different from mine, their own...but they're all in effect all very happy and clapping and that created a sense of awe...	p15, 452
		everybody in this audience is wanting to have a lovely time	p12, 339
	Feeling connected	I don't see anybody say for an hour or something like that I really do feel that one, there's a sense of I just feel the world is with me... I feel very much in this it's almost spiritual sense of wellbeing.	p24, 726
	Being part of	that awe of being part of a group of people where everybody is having a lovely time...	p33, 991
	A wish to have the same ability	I wish I had that ability to erm use language so skillfully.	p2, 31
	Anger	...you just have to acknowledge the emotions that come up. One of them uh anger that one doesn't have that skill.	p20, 598
	Something larger- above and beyond	it's almost a phenomenon is being created it's like an entity it's almost like a physical thing happening outside of those who are performing... above and beyond them they're creating a a...almost like a pie becomes a physical thing outside of them and that creates a sense of awe.	p33, 993
	Joy/euphoria	I had a strong feeling of joy in me when we'd just driven all the way to london and we were a bit tired and this feeling of huge rush of energy...	p4,123
		my heart and my ears just opened with great joy when her voice sung right out...	p4, 116
		Really euphoria, because all my kids were there, X, Y, Z, my twins, we were all in London and we were altogether and we know the words to the songs and we were all singing it was just real joy	p11,333

	Peace	it's a very strong sensation and i feel it physically...a real sense of contented, and I feel the, I just feel really peace and it's like I have this huge it's like i feel this almost out of body and in body as well but this strange amazing sense of uhm... peace	p25,737
	Present	they really did, they really got me in the present...	p5,131
	Amazed and awestruck	I was awestruck actually by how they all as a band listened to each other and it just worked. And I was sort of so amazed...	p3, 78
		...that's absolutely amazing it they were just right next to me i could have touched them	p21, 630
		she filled the space her voice was just amazing, Yeah it really was amazing...	p4, 97
	Loss	there was this sense of mmm, goodbye, and which I felt curiously torn between things, between, because there'd been quite a lot to get ready to go to London it was quite a lot the week before it'd been a REALLY busy week and the week before and then sort of returning was left thinking, I was thinking I had to remind myself almost of what it is that I find really lovely and does give me awe around here.	p17,488
		so there was this sense of loss, this sense of returning and also this sense of loss and who am I? But also looking at the things that give me awe, which have given me awe,and feeling... I am, are they still giving feeling awestruck by	p17,506
		certainly coming back and looking at it it did, i did feel very, very bereft (exhales and laughs) i felt like uhm uhm mrs bennett from pride and prejudice and (inadubile) so forlorn	p19,567
What she in awe of	Ability/Skill	it was just amazing yeah, and the band listening and she, you know how they managed to do this I don't know within the hour that they had to set up	p4,119
		...looking at D this baby when she's born and the sense of awe at one's own body can do either as a dancer or as a mother giving birth...	p10,297
		I don't know whether that evokes awe in many people but it does me because because i think it's because I'm aware how I would find it very nerve-wrecking	p21,619
		...she said I'm dying but I'm okay, I'm you know and that was amazing. I was really awe-inspired at her ability to hold it and i know that would be really upsetting for me	p35,1060

		how she managed to to cope with that and to cope with the trust that these bandmates would be there to hold it was I think really left me feeling quite awestruck	p13,382
		I was awestruck actually by how they all as a band listened to each other and it just worked. And I was sort of so amazed...	p3,78
		I was awestruck at her ability to see what she wanted to film...	p23,695
	Overcoming obstacles	to be able to overcome those very real obstacles and to be able to do that sort of performance is, I think quite amazing.	p5,143
		But my feeling of awe was actually because i knew that she'd bashed her finger (laughs) a week before she crushed her finger uhm with this (inaudible) shutting the garden gate and it was painful and her glands were up in her throat and she was really aware of this, so that created a huge, 'cos she filled the space her voice was just amazing,	p3,89
		...looking at D this baby when she's born and the sense of awe at one's own body can do either as a dancer or as a mother giving birth...	p10,297
	The natural world	to be so close to the natural world and to be part of that does create awe that's absolutely amazing	p21,629
		listening to the world is that still giving me that feeling of of contentment and awe has come now watching the spring unfold with the ferns like little fiddles and leaves unwind and just watching the world come to life	p17,517
What helps/facilitates	Coping with anxiety	So I wasn't anxious-anxious, because I just thought it will be fine. It will be what it is. But I was awestruck that it was more than, uhm they more than scraped by	p14,398
		I had the alternate voice saying there's a potential for M to lose her voice and how does she cope with this but I was looking around at her bandmates thinking they will lift her they will cover for her it will be okay.	p13,375
		I could feel myself thinking is she gonna be okay, is she going to just trust and uhm i read a lot of Ticht Naht Hanh and I sort of had him on my shoulder 'cause it was saying you know your fear for her is your own, and you just say to your fear hello fear, I am with you, and I don't tell it to go away but understand why the fear is there, the fear is actually not necessary.	p12,346

		one's uhm emotional viewpoint does colour one's ability to REALLY (emphasizes) sense awe to really be in the present moment.	p10,286
	Open to unusual/extraordinary experiences	maybe i thought it was a ghost in the night- this extraordinary experience of something coming through the, late at night, and it was quite amazing uhm at that time and i can remember feeling not frightened...	p29, 859
	Time to calm her mind	...that really happens when you just when you have time just to still to sort of the thoughts and just dissipate and then you're just	p25, 744
	Being present	I find that if one can be forget about the clock, forget about what one's supposed to be doing, what one feels one should have achieved by X hour or what one should have been achieved today or following day or even yesterday there is something about being in the present moment...where one can really feel that sense of awe.	p25, 760
	Being engaged/involved	I was really happy, so happy to be involved and the happiness i suppose did allow 'cos i was watching her thinking "gosh this is amazing what you're doing."... that did create an awe definitely, so in that sense although i was in nature and i wasn't alone, i was part of a project and that did create a awe..	p23, 701
		singing does do that as well I think it can really connect with one's soul, with one's essence.	p16,474
	Self-love and appreciaion	I think loving oneself and being able to appreciate what one has is really is...good, either for the person to feel the awe or for the person who is doing the work that makes the awe	p7,192
What hinders awe	Feeling unsafe	I think for me as a younger person because my because you know one's immediacy doesn't feel so so safe, okay, in the broad sense of the word I mean safe as in how one is in the world, I think it does colour one's ability to to feel that sensation of awe on a sort of, that there's such a sort of a level of reserve	p9,264
	Not being present	certain memories are sort of are kind of swallowed because the because one wasn't really in the present moment enough,	p9, 246
		I think when one is hurried or one's mind is thinking about other things, it's really easy to miss that sense of awe	p26, 769

	Being inauthentic	it's too easy for me to be a clown, I love that role but it's a little bit of a go-to place because it allows me to uhm to actually it's putting on a role and I've learnt it from a quite young age to do but sometimes that clown sometimes doesn't allow you to be in the present to sense awe.	p31, 952
How awe has impacted her	Alleviates her worries	I think we can be so wrapped up in our own uhm perceptions of oneself and anxieties uhm worries and trying to work out...I think awe has allowed me not to worry.	p31, 927
	Allows her to be kinder to herself	I think it's uhm yes it does because i think it has allowed me to be kinder to myself.	p28, 833
	Helps her embrace the world, stay present	I do know that life is is awe is something that has i think allowed me to embrace the world and stay in the present moment.	p32, 970
	Allowed her to be a happier person	my awe here has actually, I think made me... no, ALLOWED me to be a much happier person than say if i had stayed in london	p19, 550
Impact of maturity	She has a better grasp on anxiety/emotions to feel awe	I don't think I would have allowed myself-that really did shift...(inaudible) that's it because i don't think i would, my ah...uhm...you know anxiety levels would have blocked it.	p27, 817
		I think back on the experiences of awe when i was younger and...my ability to uhm kind of hold my fear and not be uhm overwhelmed by it were different, i don't think i had that then. I think i would sometimes let my own emotional state run past so the feeling of awe would be lessened.	p15, 425
		I think my my level my awareness of awe was uhm a little bit diminished because there was an anxiety thread running quite uh quite sort of not far from the surface.	p8, 236
	She feels a more spiritual /peaceful sense of awe in maturity.	I'd be awestruck by someone's ability and solve problems and uh yes, so I did have that type of awe feeling but I wouldn't have had the sense of awe of the peace and of wonder and a sense of uhm almost like a spiritual feeling.	p27, 806
	She is more able to be present.	I got a strong perception that I was so wrapped up in the...in all that the world was, 'cause I wasn't able to actually really feel that sense of stillness.	p27, 801
		if I think back on when I was younger, I would love to have had my awareness of awe now, and be able to be in the present moment now...then.	p27, 796
		I do know that the younger me was sort of coloured by events which wouldn't allow me to really be in the present moment.	p11, 316

	In her younger years she was searching for happiness.	...my memories of that time are ones of actually probably thinking more of in terms of wanting happiness rather than necessarily uhm, feeling awestruck by it by things.	p10, 303
	Her younger experience of awe came with desire to emulate	It was a wonderful world and I used to oh such full of awe at the physical skill and wanting so much to emulate that.	p7, 215
	She is more curious in her maturity	I probably would have been a little bit more curious and gone "goodness what's that",	p29, 865
How she sees/thinks of awe	Wonder that makes her feel small	Wonder...uhm...which can make an individual feel small but also potentially feel uhm uh...dis..disabled because one can't do something	p1, 7
		wonder which creates the sense of wonder of uhm a skill or something, a visual thing that is bigger than oneself.	p1, 11
	Awe takes one beyond oneself.	one knows when one is feeling it because it's more than happiness, it takes one out of oneself. You are looking, it's almost like you are looking at yourself no you're not looking at yourself, you're not in this body, you're looking, really looking and there is something that is extraordinary and then you feel that uhm in your body yeah, that sense of real happiness...	p34, 1029
		Something that is... that takes one to a place outside of one's own... sort of it's a moment in time which one jolts oneself into the very present i think if one is watching something in that very immediate thing.	p1,27
	Creates happiness and joy	I think awe does create happiness.Although it can create one's sense of smallness especially when one looks at skills that people have that will be so good if one have oneself.	p20, 585
		So it creates really joy, real joy,	p35, 1053
	Difficult to define	the very word which is only three letters is actually very hard to define.	p34, 1027
		Not easy! It's actually bizarrely very difficult because I'm thinking hold on what is awe?!	p32, 979
Different types of awe	Awe that is spiritual in nature evolves with time being there.	yeah and then you see and you sense and you feel in a way that wouldn't have been able to have had happened if you'd just been planted there, does that make sense? It evolves in the time that you're being, which is a totally different sense of awe to being at	p25, 748

		a gig.	
	Awe in nature is better felt alone.	although it's lovely going with people, it's actually much nicer to go by yourself because you see things that you feel really present in that moment with the world. If you're with people, even talking, it changes it really hugely you're seeing everything through someone else's eyes rather than your own whereas i don't think you feel that at the gig.	p22, 657
	She experiences different types of awe.	...that sort of that sort of awe is very different, it's a different kind of awe to being awestruck by someone's technique and abilities that oneself doesn't possess, it's a very different type of awe.	p26, 771
	Context of awe influences how she experiences it.	the awe of nature is a feeling of wonder and sort of bliss feeling...whereas the feeling from the gig would have been exaltant and euphoria sort of sensation of real joy.	p22, 650
Difference between awe and other emotions		that's interesting word, pride, because I was proud but I was more full of awe for her, does that make sense?	p4, 105
		the word pride is quite a difficult one because there's an element where one is looking for self-reflection as if it's because of me that this has happened, but it isn't.	p6, 155
		...awe does create happiness 'cause one is just totally transported, uhm uh...yeah...but does happiness create awe I don't know...	p11, 309

<b>Interview G</b>	<b>PET</b>	<b>Verbatim</b>	<b>Page Ref</b>
The experience of Awe	Amazed	in that moment together being like gobsmacked like Oh my god! But also like (Gasps) you can't be closer to an elephant in the wild you know like you just like this moment of amazement really	p4,109
		...somehow he could bring that presence on a tangible felt level that I at the back of the room could still know, taste it a little bit, that's amazing.	p15,44 8
	Surprise/shock	...just was one of those like that was a take your breath away moment	p4,96
		I think it's surprise but it's not like Aaah (gasps) it's not it's like Ooooh! Woww! It's very warm and soft in its opening	p2,51
		the awe piece of that for me is the surprise the shock of this transcendent experience in the dissolution of specific self...	p15,43 7
		this was shocking this recognition was shocking about what that was, it was like whatever he whatever his capacity is to create this milieu...	p14,41 2
	Beyond current awareness of possibility	...how is this moment possible, you know?... it's not like i haven't been on a safari before and it's amazing but that, THAT degree of intimacy? unexpected intimacy?	p4,117
		Wow like I didn't know this could be possible" or I didn't know I would ever have this moment	p2,48
	Bigger than self	you get a tiny little moment of unquestionably a part of something bigger than yourself,	p9,252
		awe is such a, it's so, uhm, you know it's so lovely to lifted out of a tight, small personalized experience into something bigger than oneself,	p6,161
		something that takes me bigger than me.	p2,29
		there's something here beyond you know often that sense of being very enclosed and tight in your own little world	p1,17
	Transcending	that time space continuum thing goes away for a little while.	p11,29 5
		you enter that state of awe there is, there those extra constructs of time and self and things kind of dissipate uh or disappear and you're just there, in it.	p10,27 6



		in the moment itself yeah it is a little it's like a little bit of a transcendent experience for me	p9,237
		t's about a direct contact uhm beyond the human experience	p2,54
	Oneness	the awe came in recognizing what was going on for me... In the naming oh the thing i'm feeling is the lack of separation, the lack of separate self.	p7,480
		sense of oneness that you're a part of it, it's not that you're knowing about it, it's that you're in it, you're in that place of oneness and that dissolves and you become your little private self again...I am a part of something bigger than me, uhm, it feels just purely experiential, not thinking about it,	p9,256
		in that moment that separateness of you know myself as a human somehow dissolves a little bit... like joining with something bigger you know the cosmos the universe the world the earth... there is a bit of dissolution of individuated self.	p9,242
		awe in sexual intimacy where you really are like in a slightly altered state...it's like that sense of separate self has dissolved and you are intimately connected but it's more like we are now both of us the external structure dissolves... I guess we have both dissolved into the larger container which is maybe in that situation eros, the energy of eros,	p12,349
		more a sense of oneness in the sense that I'm a part of it, we are immersed in it and I am no longer separate.	p13,363
		generally as humans we walk around as separate creatures and we really define ourselves comparatively me versus you and what you did and what i did...so much of our thinking really enforces separation...I love when it comes it's really so, I don't know, yeah it's very moving.	p17,500
	Connectedness	I would probably use the language of being a part of something versus connected 'cause sometimes when I think about connected I think of here me and here's you (gestures with both hands two separate sides) and we're connected and sometimes that feels uh like two still remaining two distinct parts in which we've created a bridge between us.	p11,323
		we have both become a portion of the bigger thing that is happening a part of it...so I might veer a little bit away personally from that language of connected because it's an immersion uh I feel like it's an immersion and i feel like it's a dissolution of separate self...	p12,335
	Empathy	without any specific distinction about me I unquestionably felt known in that room with him and a part of him, him a part of me somehow	p14,417

	would be an easy choice if he had been there and you know to just continue to show up every morning and feel that. Just be in it. This is a worthy place to live, you know?	p27,790
	but the sensation was so subtle in the time of sitting in the meditation space with him y... I knew I could FEEL something but I didn't articulate it until in the group in the home group and that moment of being like "Oh I actually feel known (sounds amazed and paused) here."	p15,428
	this actually this moment of recognition was actually a moment of awe where I was trying to describe what it was like being in the room with TNH and I said I feel like I know him and am known by him and I have never met him.	p14,400
	It was relieving...yeah I would say it was relieving of some of the kind of pain of conscious separation of separateness found it really soothing in a way actually	p26,780
Present, non-doing	in a state of awe where I am not a do-er. I'm not making anything happen, I'm not even like pushing or planning or you know, I'm not engaged in the moment unfolding uhm, I am invited to be present and that's. It. That's my only job.	p5,129
	Don't get in the way, don't change it, don't manipulate, don't do anything just be there.	p6,153
	that only required we stay present like there was nothing for us to do, it didn't ask anything more than just uhm breathe, stay calm (deep breath), stay present, allow, allow it to happen	p4,123
Intense	Maybe that's just the intensity. The intensity of presence you know mindful presence (pause) yeah the circumstance in a way pulls you into that state of being	p10,279
	when i think about awe it's like something around me has invited me has pulled me into that. Like oh...wow....oh my gosh... this is happening, you know.	p10,287
Calm/Stillness	there is an internal stillness I feel even when other feelings come along where it's surprise, joy, or just the thrill of the moment uhm or sometimes even the edge of fear y...all those other feelings can exist but in the middle of it, there is that quiet or stillness	p8,216
	calm actually uhm yeah it's quite like it has a settling feeling to it. It's not like it's not high intensity... in the moment it's actually it's this big wide open warm grounded like hah (Exhale) just...it's...almost ...quiet inside	p7,198
Physical/embodied	so much is in my chest and in my heart it's like (sound effect of opening ) big space, spacious, uh, warm, uhm, (pause) calm	p7,195

		awe as a feeling that is quite expansive, makes me feel expansive, it feels like this combination of very heart-centered opening but also mind, like it's a, it's a combined experience that's quite an embodied one	p1,8
	Suspension/absorption	we just both simultaneously stood up and in the presence of this incredible beast we just walked backwards into our tent uhm and stood and watched it and it very quietly walked around and... it was like the whole world disappeared	p4,100
		Yeah (excitedly) then there's room to have all the other like and it feels very human like "oh my god oh my god can you believe it can you believe it	p8,230
	Pleasant/positive	generally dissolves into like a more explicit state of excitement or lingering joy or uhm gratitude. So when I come back into my individual self I would say what I come back into is another very positive affect, you know very another really lovely emotional state to hang out in you know, of excitement or happiness usually or delight mm but then it's like oh ok now ME is having this feeling and this emotion.	p11,304
		It's such a delicious feeling, you know?	p6,160
Where she finds awe	Awe is more easily accessed in nature	the big ones were really up against the natural world uhm so for me I think in a way they invite a kind of more transcendent experience of more of that expansive opening kind of thing.	p3,60
		that's why I like the natural world, it's easy to get to that place of awe and join and be a part of it you know I think it's nature's inherent invitation to us, but for me to get there with people is actually much more rare	p16,456
	Awe can be found in a mundane place	what happened with TNT that was not huge there was absolutely nothing remarkable about it where i was on a boring mat in a stinky university gym, having this experience of non-separation from the place or the people i was with.	p16,471
		Like one of my big spiritual leaders and uhm I was at X university, 1500 at this retreat you know week long silent retreat.	p13,375
	Being present in a momentous event	I was present with my friend who gave birth and being there with her when her first child was born. Like then that's like the elephant, that's so huge you can't help but be like drawn in right	p16,466
Impact of Awe	Hope amidst suffering and difficulties	it influences me on a sort of philosophical level. I believe, i do believe there is as much good if not more good in this world than there is bad and evil...not hard to look to see good in the world uhm so for me now that keeps me capable of not just dissolving into despair	p22,669
		moments of awe uhm...for sure fuel uh my hopefulness my gratitude,	p22,

			658
		a therapist really it most directly informs me there in being able...those experiences are part of what helped me hold hope for my clients who are suffering right uhm and help me stay the course from getting you know sucked into the struggle of this lifetime,	p22, 660
		in the face of a great deal of suffering and of course I'm a therapist so you know I deal with a lot of peoples' suffering but uhm I think i really had to have things to hang my head on to stay hopeful and present in being in this life, in this lifetime and uhm so now I think for me there's been a, (pause) a willingness and openness and a need for the reminder	p19, 550
		invitation to wake up to the beauty in the world or the you know the (pause) yeah the uhm the good,	p1, 14
	Profound and memorable	it's easy to recreate that sensation and see myself there it's a very like it's a full embodied imprint my memory where the sensation of like (Gasps) and the visuals and seeing exactly where i am and what you can hear like that comes as a whole package an embodied package of a memory.	p7, 181
		what's interesting is that it has a big imprint like the sensation of it from a memory standpoint stays with me. Uhm, right, when I think of those distinct moments of awe, it's easy to return to the sensation of it. And I think that's because it is so, it's so captivating	p6, 166
	The choice of a different narrative of life	I have this you know oh and this moment and this moment and this moment, like uh like uh a string of beautiful gems uhm...that is an equally true story to tell as the story of all the hard things that I could tell that story too...I like having a choice about what story I tell about my life, you know, I can tell the story of all these moments of awe and expansiveness and spiritual awakening or invitation...uhm...and it's it's a true story, you know?	p23, 683
		it's a relief in a way, it's relieving. (Pause) yeah it feels lighter, uhm, you know, easy to carry,	p24, 707
		...my need for these moments was to taste that other place and to kind of hold on to some hopefulness and to find some uhm reassurance about this difficult state of being human.	p19, 545
	Spiritual orientation	I'm certainly spiritually oriented and so for me that meant participation in environments that is about paying attention to bigger than oneself so partly orientation to the world and what i find meaningful.	p19, 563
	Emotional flexibility	I'm pretty comfy I love riding the waves of variety of emotions...that doesn't bother me so I think if you have that emotional flexibility then maybe there's a bit of room for it.	p19, 568
	What facilitates awe		

	A liking and disposition for awe	I like these experiences and I want them, so there is some orientation to experience the world first hand...I like getting out of my own way, I like that transcendent experience	p18,533
		I love it (laughs) 'cause i'm like Wowww...	p6,164
		when I saw your call I was like "I'm totally that gal!" (excitedly) I know this moments I have them, like regularly in my life.	p18,525
	Longing for oneness	I have a personal trauma history and as a child and I recall often longing to get out of this world and go back to some better state that I believe happened before I became a human being.	p18,539
		I believe that there is a human longing for to know that you know to return to that sense of oneness and and the opportunity to return to it with other humans...	p17,496
	Purposefully seeking	I think in myself I take myself to places on purpose.	p19,575
		I have purposely taken myself out into environments where that speaks to me, at that level, you know. I purposely gone on an intensive retreat environments you know, I've (inaudible) gone exploring in places that make me uncomfortable, you know.	p20,584
Impact of maturity	Less aware of awe as she has prioritised stability over risk-taking	I have become less aware of awe or have less experiences of awe in that more conservative uhm you know, put your head down try and make some money, work hard. I've been less in pursuit of intensive personal experience and more in pursuit of uh stabilizing my financial foundation...I don't really enjoy it as much as previous lifestyles that I've led	p20,611
		the last ten years the path I've taken has been to curb some of that impulsive uhm fun and walk on more (pause) uh...culturally...more...mainstream lifestyle? And... so I will say that middle of the road lifestyle of seeking you know stable finances uhm as a primary goal has just been less awe-inspiring.	p21,635
	Experience of awe has remained the same	I would say the internal experience and that sense of preciousness is the same, that has remained throughout my life.	p20,605
What it is like talking about awe	It helps her to harvest more out of the single experience	there's something about in the moment you're so there but then later it's good to have some other reasons to kind of come back to them you know and uhm (inaudible) be reminded of them...harvest the moment a little bit more, you know? So they don't have to be just this standalone moment.	p24,718

	It helps her in gaining some clarity over her experiences	I think uh that invitation to do this thinking has... grabbed those pieces more clearly...	p24, 716
	It is awkward and difficult to put in words	tt's AWKWARD, T! Yeah it's a real real struggle! (pause) uh it's good it's good practice,	p25, 742
		it's not even the right language actually but that we were a part	p14,419
		it's very hard to put words around this 'cause it's interesting...	p10, 271
	She feels awe talking about it.	I have never had moments where I tell the story and I don't get the feeling of awe return.	p7, 189
	Tender	it's very tender I think it feels precious because for me it's rare, it's a rare experience of awe with people or rare experience of dissolution of self uh with others.	p17, 490
	Frustrating to not be able give someone else that felt experience.	it's a little frustrating because you have this (slurping sound) mmm delicious experience and you want to go back to it and you feel everything you're in it and you're only going to be able to give this like slightly mangled version of it out to the world because you can't give that felt sense to somebody when in describing, right?	p25, 745
	Intense and grateful	Good I feel a little tired, yeah it was an intense conversation, lovely conversation, i feel really grateful.	p27, 808
What she thinks about awe		I don't think it can be created those moments can't be forced or created uhm and they only really I feel like the big message in my moments of awe is pay attention... be here, like let it... let yourself feel this, right?	p5, 139
		it's quite uhm captivating or outside my normal day to day uh experience.	p2, 45