

Guest Editor's note: Achieving climate justice: A practitioner call to action

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Gávi Ansara

Acknowledgement of Country

As a mixed polycultural psychotherapist, I have lived experience of marginalisation and exclusion from white Anglo Australian contexts, while cultivating cultural humility and accountability regarding my non-Aboriginal privilege. Living and working on unceded Boonwurrung Country in the Kulin Nations, I acknowledge the ongoing impacts of racism, genocide, colonisation, the destruction of sacred lands and waters, and the colonialist devaluing of over 65,000 years of ancestral and living Aboriginal wisdom about how to care for these lands and waters. Aboriginal Elders and ancestors have never ceased sharing their wisdom, which is informed by these lands and waters themselves and by our kin of other species; it is we non-Aboriginal people who must choose to listen to and act on this wisdom. All of our survival depends on it.

In the Aboriginal lands colonially known as Australia, climate change has yet to be widely recognised in professional codes of ethics in terms of our professional duty of care; our duty to act has yet to be understood as an ethical imperative. I am deeply grateful to authors Rana Rose Kökçinar and Nell Azuri for their courage in tackling the topic of climate change from a *climate justice* framework (Sultana, 2022)—that is, an approach that addresses the societal, systemic, political, and environmental resource inequities and the social and environmental justice concerns of power, privilege, and oppression dynamics involved in human-caused climate change. This topic is far too often obfuscated by practitioner disavowal of therapy participants' substantive practical concerns (Azuri, 2022). Both authors articulate the need to consider how practitioners can apply a *transformative climate justice* approach (Newell et al., 2020)—one that prioritises the disruption of power relations and makes systemic change to decision-making processes that entrench and perpetuate climate injustices, when practitioners address climate-related distress.

Azuri's (2022) article explores this problem through the concept of climate change disavowal and illustrates how practitioner disavowal can result in practitioners' lack of noticing and engaging with climate change concerns in therapeutic contexts. Azuri illuminates a vicious cycle that can trigger practitioners' climate change disavowal, then offers a virtuous cycle that can help practitioners to improve responses to our own climate

disavowal. Azuri shows how this approach can help practitioners to notice and identify climate distress when it is present and to improve the quality of our therapeutic responses by turning towards climate-related distress instead of turning away.

Writing from Tarntanya in Kurna Country, Kökçinar (2022) critiques individualistic approaches that claim to solve the problem of climate-related distress (CCRD) through *individual* behaviour change, analysing the limitations and harmful consequences of this medical paradigm. Kökçinar shows how these approaches oversimplify the complexity of CCRD and how this oversimplification in turn results in diverting scrutiny away from the systemic power imbalances and societal and environmental injustices that research shows are the key contributors both to climate change and people's distress about that change. Instead, Kökçinar offers a viable strategy for practitioners to shift towards non-pathologising, collective-centred therapeutic responses to CCRD through the Power Threat Meaning Framework (PTMF). Kökçinar also discusses some key concerns that neurodivergent communities have raised about the misuse of this framework to invalidate neurodivergent people's lived experiences and highlights the specific benefits that a neurodivergent-affirming adaptation of the PTMF can offer practitioners working with marginalised communities.

I thank Gina O'Neill, member of both the PACFA Research Committee and PACFA's College of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Practices (CATSIHP), for her early collaboration and contributions to this initiative. I also thank *PACJA* Editor Jane Marsden for her principled and compassionate leadership from the beginning of her role, Research Committee Chair Alexandra Bloch-Atefi and Christie Wilson for their steadfast support for this initiative, and the Research Committee for recognising the need for *PACJA* to prioritise this topic. Thank you to the reviewers whose generous and insightful feedback supported me and our authors.

Even the editorial process was not immune from the impact of our current climate crisis. What was initially planned as a special issue on climate justice shifted in response to events indicative of the very phenomena we sought to address: Several colleagues who were initially planning to collaborate with me on the special issue were forced to withdraw due to the devastating impact of climate change on their homes and communities. Several authors who had intended to contribute to the special issue experienced climate-related catastrophes that made finding safe sanitation, drinking water, and housing a more urgent imperative than writing about this problem. These actual lived experiences of external forces depriving people of the tangible resources necessary to sustain life contrast starkly with dominant professional approaches to CCRD as an intrapsychic cognitive and behavioural problem rather than a legitimate practical and environmental problem facing our world.

Emeritus professor and Indigenous trauma healing specialist Judy Atkinson, who serves as CATSIHP Convenor, asserted that healing begins with deep listening, the kind of deep listening that comes with a responsibility to act ([TedX Talks, 2017](#)). Our collective responsibility as practitioners is to provide leadership and to support participants in

therapy and healing practices to take collective action to address our climate crisis, not to turn away from or invalidate the climate distress of people seeking our support and understanding.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander healing practitioners have already been providing leadership and taking collective action to address our climate crisis for decades, often while facing active resistance, hostility, and violence. As practitioners, we have a collective ethical imperative to envision how we might contribute to the collective transformation needed to provide climate justice leadership in our professions. Self-described Black lesbian mother, warrior, and poet Audre Lorde, who had lived experience of cancer and disability, also stressed the collective duty for action. In 1988, Lorde famously explained that “caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare” (Lorde, 2017, p. 130). This understanding of self-care as an act of survival grounded in collective political action is often erased from psychotherapy and counselling discourses, which frequently misappropriate “self-care” and strip this concept of its collective liberatory potential. Our collective professional duty of care and ethical imperative is to shift away from climate change disavowal towards a climate justice approach informed by Lorde’s original understanding that “*self-care*”, particularly for marginalised communities, requires a context of *collective* action.

Our world is in climate crisis, and the time for urgent collective action is *now*. I invite you to join me and our authors in turning towards our collective climate distress and collaborating on our collective professional duty to contribute to climate justice.

Thank you.

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Professional Biography and Reflective Positioning Statement

<https://ansarapsychotherapy.com/positioning/>

Address for Correspondence

gavi@ansarapsychotherapy.com

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